

SERIOUS LEISURE, PARTICIPATION AND EXPERIENCE IN TOURISM:  
AUTHENTICITY AND RITUAL IN A RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL

A Dissertation

by

HYOUNGGON KIM

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2004

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

Serious Leisure, Participation and Experience in Tourism: Authenticity and Ritual in a  
Renaissance Festival. (December 2004)

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This study examined the Texas Renaissance Festival as perceived and experienced by (serious) visitors for whom this was a form of regular, repeated and highly meaningful participation. Specifically, the focus was to gain understanding of the notion of serious leisure as defined by Stebbins, in the context of festivals, and to understand the meanings associated with festival participation. Following a qualitative (constructivism paradigm) research frame, the data were collected through participant observation and 37 in-depth interviews for highly committed tourists to the Texas Renaissance Festival. The collected data were analyzed through Grounded Theory techniques specified by Glaser (1978).

In regard to the characteristics of participation, the results indicated that their continuous participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival displays qualities of serious leisure: 1) identification; 2) long-term career; 3) unique ethos; 4) significant personal effort; 5) perseverance; and 6) durable personal benefits. As they become more seriously involved in the festival participation, they tend to be a part of a well-integrated subculture of which prominent values include personal freedom, hedonism, and anti-materialism. The experiences constructed through the serious festival participation were reminiscent of tourism existential authenticity specified by Wang (1999) as two levels: intrapersonal authenticity (gaining one's true self) and interpersonal authenticity (gaining true human relationship). A search of such authentic experiences at the festival seems to be partly driven by the perceived alienation in everyday life.

When these aspects were examined from an interpretive and meaning-based approach, attending the festival in a serious manner is not just a simple matter of escaping from the reality (e.g., alienation) of everyday life, but is an active quest for an “alternative” to their lives at home as many indicated. Thus, the serious participation in a tourism activity such as the Texas Renaissance Festival could be best understood as a dynamic process of attaining existential state of Being in response to diverse sociocultural conditions. Several significant theoretical propositions were made based on the results derived from this study. Additionally, marketing and management implications associated with staging tourism events and festivals were discussed.

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of the Ren'ies who shared their thoughts about their experience at the Texas Renaissance Festival. I am indebted to all of the study participants for their fascinating insights.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, the increasing popularity of festivals as tourism attractions has evoked significant attention from tourism scholars. Previous empirical studies have examined economic impacts (Long and Perdue 1990; Crompton and McKay 1994), motivations of people to attend festivals and special events (Crompton and McKay 1997; Dewar, Meyer and Mei Li 2001; Formica and Uysal 1998; Mohr, Backman, Gahan and Backman, 1993), satisfaction associated with perceived authenticity (Chabra, Hilly, and Sills 2003), cultural consumption patterns of festival visitors (Prentice and Anderson 2003), and organizers' perceptions of the socio-economic impacts of festival (Gursoy, Kim, and Uysal 2003). Together, these studies have provided a descriptive view of festival participation and impacts.

Within the context of tourism, festival participation can be conceived of as special interest tourism (Weiler and Hall 1992) and also creative tourism (Richards 2001). In special interest tourism, the general emphasis is placed on the importance of specific activities that can be pursued in a particular region or at a particular destination. It is the uniqueness of the activity around which the total travel experience is planned and developed. Richards (2001) viewed creative tourism as the pursuit of creativity, through touristic experiences, in a coherent and cumulative manner. The notions of special interest tourism and creative tourism imply a certain sense of seriousness in the chosen tourism activity. This “seriousness” can be demonstrated by repeat participation, a different kind of on-site participation than more casual participation, and an enduring interest in the particular activity. Stebbins (1996; 1997a) conceptualized serious tourists as those for whom cultural pursuits are an active form of identity creation, an extension of general leisure, and a systematic pursuit. Prentice and

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This dissertation follows the style of the Annals of Tourism Research.

Anderson (2003) contended that festivals often attract serious tourists who actively consume the familiar as an art form or socialization. Through an extensive survey of two Scottish festivals (the Book Festival and the Film Festival), they claimed that serious consumers (determined by active consumption of cultural components and repeat visitations) constitute one distinctive segment of visitors to the festivals. They maintained that understanding this form of serious consumption is central to understanding festival visitors. In other words, the presence of serious participants is necessary for a festival's existence because they play a significant role in constructing the atmosphere of the festival and help to sustain what it stands for. Despite this very important claim, very little previous research has been done to understand serious visitors at festivals. My dissertation research aims to fill some of this gap in understanding the serious leisure tourist and what this means with respect to festival participation and enactment.

In taking up this important issue as the main focus of dissertation study, it is first necessary to identify some characteristics of festival participation in addition to the notion of seriousness. An aspect of festival participation typical of medieval fairs, for instance, is its carnivalesque feature. Many such festivals are characterized by a culture that involves a suspension of existing social norms and regulations (Abraham 1982). Bakhtin (1984: 10) argued that "Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions." In early modern Europe, a carnival was a time of ecstasy and liberation in which the world is upside down. The hidden function of the Carnival was believed to be in maintaining existing social order by offering an outlet for subordinates to compensate them for the everyday frustration arising from social inequalities (Burke 1978).

A close look at the characteristics of contemporary festivals suggests two crucial areas that beg for systematic research exploration. First, festivals may involve seriousness for some visitors. Serious consumption of festival experience may be central to understanding the nature of festival participation for at least one group of visitors that

has not been well studied. The implications of this participation remain unknown at the personal level and with respect to the carnivalesque nature of some festivals. Second, festivals are often conceived of as special temporary events that involve various ritualistic qualities (Leach 1961). Most festivals are cyclical in nature, with events held on a regular basis (e.g., annually) and repeat visitors constitute an important market segment (Prentice and Anderson 2003). This implies that ritualistic activities may constitute an important aspect of festival experience, which may relate the seriousness with which participants relate to the festival. Thus, an understanding of serious festival participation and ritualistic characteristics may contribute greatly to the knowledge base on festival enactment and management.

One particular type of festival that lends itself to studying serious consumption and rituals is the Renaissance themed festival. Today, Renaissance themed festivals are thriving in North America and the number of such carnivalesque festivals has rapidly increased. As of 2003, there were 168 Renaissance themed festivals held within the U.S. ([www.renfaire.com](http://www.renfaire.com)). A Renaissance festival is designed to recreate the atmosphere of the Renaissance era in a certain location for several weeks. The festival involves craft fairs, historical reenactments, and performance art. To contribute to its cultural enactment, everyone working at the festival dresses in period costumes and acts accordingly. Furthermore, a considerable number of visitors are likely to come in costumes and role play consistent with the festival's theme. The growing popularity of Renaissance themed festivals around the United States, and what appears to be an enduring commitment by many Renaissance festival participants suggests that these carnivals can provide an important context for exploring the serious aspects of festival participation. Serious participation in a Renaissance themed festival is the focus of this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and participation of serious visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival in order to increase understanding of

this novel and specialized form of tourism behavior. The Texas Renaissance Festival is not only claimed to be the largest Renaissance (or medieval) themed event in North America, it also serve as an important regional tourism attraction. In addition to its significant status, it appears to act as a forum for many repeat visitors who are dedicated attendees of this and possibly other similar Renaissance or Medieval themed festivals. By focusing on serious participants, this study attempts to generate insight into various aspects of participation, including forms of participation, meanings associated with the festival experience, identity-related and social implications of this participation. More broadly, this study examines the concept of serious leisure within the context of tourism, occurring in spaces away from everyday life and daily social world. Given how little attempt has been made to date to understand the meaning of serious leisure specifically with respect to the touristic space (exceptions include Stebbins, 1996; 1997a), this study aims to explore the forms and characteristics of serious tourism consumption, using the Texas Renaissance Festival as a primary setting for the study.

### **Research Questions and Outline**

The general research questions that guide this study have emerged from my personal and research experiences of festivals, plus a comprehensive review of related literature. Two theoretical orientations were identified that offer meaningful “sensitizing concepts” for the study: serious leisure, developed primarily by Stebbins (1979; 1982; 1992; 2001), and ritual characteristics, typically associated with the work of Turner (1969; 1974; 1982). The concept of tourism authenticity (McCannell 1973; Wang 1999; 2000) was not identified early in the research design, but emerged as an important area during data analysis. Rather than serving as definitive concepts that provide a clear definition of attributes for the phenomenon under study, sensitizing concepts alert the researcher to the social phenomena happening around him/her and provide general directions along which to look (Blumer 1954).

Two broad research questions with sub-questions served to guide this study:

1. To what extent do festival goers' participation reflect the characteristics of serious leisure participation, as described by Stebbins (1992; 2001)?

2. What are their experiences like during the festival and what meanings do they place on their experiences?

2-1. In what rituals and practices do festival goers participate, and how does this participation affect on-site experience at the Renaissance festival?

2-2. How do the costume and other symbolic materials visitors wear affect their experience at the Renaissance festival?

2-3. How does long-term commitment to the Renaissance festivals affect a participant's identity?

These research questions are explored in the following chapters which consist of a comprehensive literature review (Chapter II), methodological approach (Chapter III), emergent themes and concepts (Chapter IV), a grounded theory discussion (Chapter V), plus conclusions and implications (Chapter VI).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study focusing on serious festival participation makes a significant contribution to understanding one of the most fundamental issues of social science-how individuals maintain their social existence in response to various sociocultural conditions. Stebbins (2001) maintained that for many contemporary individuals in a completely industrialized society, serious leisure pursuit could be a substitute for work to derive a central meaning of life. In a similar way, this study illustrates how one fulfills various fundamental personal and social needs through serious engagement in a Renaissance themed festival. Therefore, this study helps understand the linkage between serious leisure pursuit and maintenance of social existence.

In addition, there are several marketing and theoretical contributions that can be made from this study. From a marketing standpoint, this study can offer festival operators an insightful look at the functioning of Renaissance themed festivals. Understanding consumers (visitors) is an essential ingredient for festival managers to



develop an effective marketing strategy (Getz and Cheyne 1997). This study contributes understanding of a certain segment of highly dedicated visitors. Serious tourists are driven by intense interest sustained over many years with certain tourism activities. Also, from the social world perspective, they can be specified as “regulars”, implying a high level of commitment to the festival (Strauss 1978; Unruh 1979). The symbolic position they have achieved within the festival tends to endow them, whether consciously or unconsciously, a certain degree of power to diffuse a specific festival spirit to other visitors. They act as cultural consumers and producers at the same time. For this reason, understanding this particular segment of visitors offers useful marketing and management information that can affect both serious participants and casual participants.

Theoretically, this study contributes to existing academic knowledge in several ways. Firstly, festival participation as a type of serious leisure in tourism has received little empirical attention from both tourism and leisure scholars. It could be argued that this is due, in part, to the disciplinary differences in the way these two fields of study have emerged. Therefore, this study will enhance conceptual understanding of the relationship between festival participation and serious leisure, and assisting in bridging some of the disciplinary gap between leisure and tourism studies.

Secondly, because serious consumers in the Renaissance festival may contribute strongly to the cultural production of the festival, insight into their participation will help understand the important dynamic between festival consumption and festival production. From the consumption perspective, serious visitors may be viewed as an active consumer of the festival as demonstrated by repeat visitations. While being an active consumer, they also tend to serve as a generator of festival experience for other casual visitors by performing various period or fantasy characters. That is, they assume the role of both consumer and producer at the festival. This interactive dynamic of consumption and production is of interest to planners, marketers and other beneficiaries of the festival production, for it is an important dimension of the enjoyment and satisfaction of all visitors to the festival.

Thirdly, this study can help understand on-site festival experience and associated meanings within the context of ritual process theory developed in anthropology. Although Turner's ritual theory has great potential to explain voluntary touristic experiences from a contemporary perspective, the extent of its applicability to various tourism phenomena has not been systematically explored (Cohen 1992). It can be said that the Renaissance themed festivals have characteristics of both modern ritual (communal participation) and tourism attraction. This study will help expand the possible applicability of Turnerian tradition to not only festival research but also tourism studies in general. This study, therefore, contributes to the development of theoretical understanding of the meaning of festival experience.

An additional contribution can be made in regard to the function of carnival-oriented festivals. The rhetoric regarding festivals resides in renewal, liberation, and group solidarity (Bakhtin 1984; Burke 1978; Abrahams 1982). Festivals are believed to offer participants liberating and regenerative experience so that they can return to their everyday life. The rhetoric continues to suggest that the sharing of temporary disorder and liberating experience among participants enhances group solidarity which, in turn, helps maintain society. However, little empirical research has been conducted to affirm this function of festivals in contemporary modern life. Therefore, this study can help bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality by empirically examining festival participation and experience in the Renaissance festival in Texas.

Finally, this study contributes to understanding the linkage between tourist experience and authenticity. Previous research on cultural/heritage tourism has often dealt with the issue of tourism authenticity by delving into the perceived historical accuracy of the cultural artifacts or performed activities (Chhabra, Healy, and Sills 2003; McIntosh and Prentice 1999; Taylor 2001; Waite 2000). That is, the examination of the object-related authenticity has been a primary way to explore tourist experience. This study, however, reveals the importance of understanding tourist experience from the perspective of existential authenticity (conceptually identified by Wang, 1999). Thus, it contributes to expanding the theoretical literature on authenticity tourism studies.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The primary focus of the present study resides in the experiences of those who undertake the enduring commitment to the Texas Renaissance Festival in terms of meanings and rituals associated with the festival participation. The nature of this study is not quantitative based on deductive reasoning but qualitative based on inductive reasoning. Hence, several theoretical perspectives that were introduced in this chapter are to help guide the initial research questions. Unlike a quantitative research framework (based on positivism or post-positivism paradigm) that sets the specific hypotheses derived from the existing theories, a qualitative approach (based on constructivism paradigm) utilizes existing theories as a sensitizing concept that helps a researcher develop research questions, modify the research directions, and analyze emerging themes. Thus, the multiple theoretical perspectives provided here are not to be definitive but sensitive in nature; they provide a base to initiate the research in a more informed manner. Serious leisure and ritual theory were the two major theoretical perspectives that initially helped form this study. Both theories are relevant to the complexities of festival-goers' tourism practices and meanings associated with the festival. Specifically, the meaning of enduring festival participation is explored in reference to the concept of serious leisure. That is, theory of serious leisure provides an analytical framework to understand the meaning of their on-going participation in the Renaissance festival. On the other hand, Turner's ritual theory helps understand their on-site experiences (related to costumes and social interactions) and meanings attached to it. In addition, as the Texas Renaissance Festival displays the features of the commercial festival and amusement theme park, tourism literature focusing on these sites was briefly reviewed to better locate the current study amidst other festival and theme park studies.

### **Previous Research on Tourism Precincts**

A Renaissance themed festival, which is the focus of this study, commonly takes a mixed form of theme park and festival that aim to attract regional tourists. Thus, previous research on tourism precincts was reviewed below in order to better understand the significance of this dissertation research in relation to the existing literature.

Hayllar and Griffin (2004) define a tourism precinct as “a distinctive geographic area within a larger urban area, characterized by a concentration of tourist related land uses, activities and visitation, with fairly definable boundaries”. Among other tourism precincts, the commercial festivals and theme parks represent the most common form of tourism precinct. Over the last decade, the development of festivals and theme parks has received increasing attention as a viable tourism attraction. Accordingly, there has been increasing number of festival and theme park related studies published in recent years. The published studies represent diverse dimensions of academic interest in the phenomenon. The domains of interest include urban planning perspective (Getz 1993), sociological/anthropological understanding (Boje 1995; Moore 1980), and visitor experiences from marketing perspective (McIntosh and Prentice 1999; Zeppel 2002). Given that the main focus of the present study is related to understanding visitor experiences at a certain tourism enclave, a more detailed review of visitor experiences at festivals and theme parks was conducted below.

The study of festivals produced a significant number of published materials particularly on tourist perceptions and a range of socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists. Particularly, there exist a considerable number of studies on visitor motivations for the festival participation. The range of festivals studied include the Travellers Rest County Corn festival (Uysal, Gahan, & Martin, 1993), the Freedom Weekend Aloft hot air balloon festival (Mohr, Backman, Gahan, & Backman, 1993), Fiesta San Antonio (Crompton & MacKay, 1997), Canadian Jazz festival (Saleh & Ryan, 1993), three urban nature themed festivals (Scott 1996), Umbria Jazz Festival (Formica & Uysal, 1996), a First Night festival (Kerstetter & Mowrer, 1998), the Spoleto Festival (music festival) (Formica & Uysal 1998), and the Harbin Ice Lantern

and Snow Festival in China (Dewar, Meyer, & Mei Li 2001). Conducted as an extension of tourism motivation research, the festival motivation studies have collectively identified several core reasons to attend a festival as a tourism attraction. The central motivations generally encompass family togetherness, social interaction, escape from everyday routines, and pleasure seeking through the festival attractions although there exists a certain level of variability according to different types of festival. The results appear to coincide with tourism motivation studies to a great extent.

While a majority of festival studies are limited to examining visitor motivations or other perceptions, a research tradition on theme parks represents more diverse perspectives and interests. For example, as Disney theme parks (Disneyworld and Disneyland) have emerged as a cultural icon of the time era, numerous studies have been conducted on the commercial theme parks from diverse disciplinary perspectives. The topics of academic research specifically focusing on Disney theme parks include the meaning of such a magic kingdom within the postmodern context (Boje 1995), modern pilgrimage center (Moore 1980), and potential marketing strategy through branding (D’Hauteserre 2001). Triggered by the opening of Disney theme parks, diverse types of theme parks have emerged that strive to create a fantasy atmosphere of another time and space (Milman 2001). In response to the recent popularity of theme parks as a tourism attraction, tourism researchers have increasingly approached the theme parks as a topic of academic research. Consequently, there has been notable increase in publications over the last decade. The topics that have been studied emphasize generating marketing implications such as market segmentation (Milman 1988; 1991), the economic aspects of theme parks (Braun and Soskin 1999), the planning of theme park industry from management’s perspective (Milman 2001), visitor emotions and satisfaction (Bigne, Andreu, and Gnoth 2004), and a catalyst for tourism development in a peripheral area (Dybedal 1998).

With the increasing interest in heritage and cultural artifacts (both tangible and intangible) particularly in the developed Western countries (Hewison 1987), the study of heritage/cultural themes parks has become a significant focus of recent tourism

literature. The majority of the studies on heritage theme parks addressed visitor profiles and perceptions as a result of activity participation in the theme parks. For example, Zeppel (2002) identified socio-demographic profiles of tourists, preferred cultural activities, and authenticity of the provided attractions at a native cultural theme park in Canada. Similarly, Moscardo and Pearce (1999) examined visitors at the Tjapuka Aboriginal Cultural Park in Australia in regard to visitor profiles, the level of satisfaction through cultural activities they engaged, and the perceived benefits such as cultural learning. Other studies conducted at industrial heritage parks focused on exploring the motivations, experiences that consist of cognitive and affective dimensions, perceived benefits, and determining factors of such experiences and benefits (Beeho and Prentice 1997; Prentice, Witt, and Hamer 1998). Also, they attempted to identify the different visitor segments based on the perceived benefits and experiences. The most prominent benefits and experiences are related to learning history, evoking pleasant mood, and contrast and appreciation of the present life.

While the issue of identifying visitor profiles and marketing perceptions is still the most common research foci, the perceived authenticity of heritage/cultural displays has also emerged as an important research topic in heritage/theme park studies. Waitt (2000), in a study of visitors at The Rocks, attempted to identify the factors that affect their perceived authenticity toward the representation of history at the heritage park. The factors that were found to be influential include gender, place of residence, and stage of lifecycle. Specifically, young females or tourists from overseas were less likely to authenticate the imagined past represented through physical settings and activities. More recently, Chhabra, Healy, and Sills (2003), through surveying the visitors at the Flora Macdonald Scottish Highland Games, showed that the level of perceived authenticity (in regard to the activities, settings, and interactions between touring members) is affected by the connections to Scottish heritage and the level of involvement with it. On the other hand, McIntosh and Prentice's (1999) study of tourists at three British period theme parks provides somewhat different perspective on the issue of visitor experiences and the authenticity of settings. They, through an extensive visitor

survey, suggested that the historical accuracy of the settings might not be the main concern for tourists as conventionally believed. It was argued that the cultural heritage settings are appreciated not just because they provide an insight into the past but because they provide an insight into visitors themselves. Thus, the identification of personal meanings as a result of visitation, they contend, may be more important than the examination of cognitive outcomes of a visit or the reception of historical accuracy.

A brief review of previous research on the topic reveals that a majority of the theme park visitor studies are characterized as having a heavy reliance on pre-structured survey methods. Although these studies are still meaningful to understanding the visitor characteristics and their experiences at heritage/cultural parks to a certain extent, the examination of the perceptions and experiences at the sites is automatically limited by the pre-structured items. They hardly reflect the dynamic nature of human experiences occurring as a result of dynamic interactions between people to people and people to environments. Thus, it seems that developing an understanding of the theme park experience from the tourist's perspective has been a neglected area with Hayllar and Griffin's (2004) study of visitor experiences at The Rocks being the exception. Through phenomenological study of visitor experience at the historical precinct The Rocks, they identified two essential elements of visitor experience: intimacy (experienced through the interaction with the physical elements of The Rocks) and authenticity (conceiving the precinct as a place with a unique identity). It seems certain that this phenomenological understanding may help delve into the unexplored dimensions of tourist experience at a heritage/cultural theme park particularly from tourists' own perspectives. Thus, the use of qualitative research should be encouraged in a tourism precinct study to expand the way to comprehend visitor experiences. Also, previous studies tend to view tourists at a heritage/cultural theme park as a rather homogeneous group of individuals although much tourism literature as well as studies of theme park visitors advocates the existence of diverse types of tourists in terms of their involvement and subsequent experiences. It draws research attention to exploring visitor experiences along different levels of involvement or segmentation. This study, in

response to these deficiencies, attempts to explore highly committed visitors to a heritage theme park (a Renaissance festival) in terms of their participation and experience. A meaning of high commitment is further explored in light of theory of serious leisure in a following section.

## **Serious Leisure**

### **Evolution of serious leisure**

The term, serious leisure, was coined by Stebbins (1996) based on his extensive ethnographic studies (1979; 1982; 1992). He defined serious leisure as “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge” (Stebbins 1992: 3). As implied in the definition, it stresses the meanings and values in particular forms of leisure commitment for their own intrinsic reward. Tomlinson (1993) argues that serious leisure can be seen as a particular type of reaction to new social and cultural situations where sources of meaning and solidarity such as traditional communities and religious institutes are no longer effective. In particular, with the advent of Information Age, serious leisure can serve as a non-remunerative substitute for work for those who find they have too little of it (Stebbins 2001a: 56). That is, he contends that for those who lost available communal connections tend to reclaim them through participation in serious leisure because the job is too insubstantial to invest positive emotional, physical, and intellectual energy. He continued to argue that “in the Information Age, it will be the only remaining area where these people can find a community role capable of fostering significant self respect” (p. 57). Accordingly, Stebbins (1994: 182) stated that “serious leisure activities contribute to the integration of society through the highly evolved social worlds that spring up around their serious leisure”. Thus, from the sociological perspective, the major function of serious leisure is to create and communicate meanings that enhance solidarity of society. Psychological contribution of serious leisure to its participants also resides in achieving a sense of belonging and participation by forming unique social



ethos around the chosen leisure activity (Stebbins 2001a). He continued to predict that serious leisure in post-industrialist society, where the role of paid-work seems to be diminishing, will increasingly serve as a substitute lifestyle, identity, and central life interest.

Serious leisure is commonly contrasted to the concept of casual leisure or unserious leisure which was perceived to be a prevalent phenomenon of contemporary industrialized society (Stebbins 2001a). Thus, casual leisure as a contrasting concept was defined as “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins 1997b: 18). It is less substantial and does not offer any career of the sort described for serious leisure. Examples include play, relaxation (e.g., sitting, napping, strolling), passive entertainment (e.g., TV, books, recorded music), social conversation, and sensory stimulation (e.g., eating, drinking). A central property of casual leisure can be characterized as hedonism (pleasure and enjoyment) as opposed to enduring satisfaction and rewardingness which are the defining character of serious leisure. However, it is not realistic to assume that only casual leisure is identified with hedonic reward. Both casual leisure and serious leisure tend to provide hedonic reward although it is likely to be more prominent in casual leisure. Following Chiksenmihaly (1975)’s theory of flow, Stebbins (1997b) contended that casual leisure activities often fail to generate a sense of optimal experience because they often lack a substantial challenge and the component of feeling in control over the activities which are the basic elements of achieving a sense of flow.

### **Types of participation in serious leisure**

Stebbins (1982) proposed three basic categories of participation in serious leisure: amateurism, hobbyist pursuits, and career volunteering. A considerable number of empirical research has confirmed the existence of these different participation categories in serious leisure. However, it should be noted that they still share multiple

similarities in terms of general characteristics besides the high level of commitment to the chosen leisure pursuits.

### Amateurism

Amateurs who operate in the fields such as art, sport, science, and entertainment are commonly understood in contrast to their professional counterparts. According to Stebbins (1979), the conception of amateurism needs to be understood within the system of relations between public, amateurs, and professionals. Publics “are sets of people with a common interest; people not served by professionals, or amateurs, or both, and who make active demands on them” (Stebbins 1992: 59). This P-A-P model has been used to explain the social structure of amateurs. However, Yoder (1997) proposed that this conventional model needs to be modified in the case of commodity intensive serious leisure such as tournament of bass fishing by adding commodity agents to the organizational structure. Much of serious leisure literature has dealt with the activities of amateurs. These include: pursuit of archaeological knowledge by non-professionals (Taylor 1995); American Kennel Club (AKC) activity (Baldwin and Norris 1999); and tournament bass fishing (Yoder 1997).

### Hobbyist activities

In contrast to amateurs, hobbyists lack this professional counterpart although sometimes they have commercial equivalents and small publics who take an interest in what they do. As such they are not part of any P-A-P system. Considerable scholarly attention has been given to the hobbyists’ activities and as a result five categories of hobbyists have been identified: collectors, makers and tinkerers, activity participants (in noncompetitive, rule-based pursuits), players of sports and games (in competitive, rule-based activities with no professional counterparts), and enthusiasts in one of the liberal arts. More recently, Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak (2002), through their study of University of Florida football fans, suggested that this categorization be expanded to include what they term the sport enthusiast. A study of football fandom conducted in the U.K. also supports this contention (Jones 2000). In regard to collectors, only one

empirical research, which explored the world of stamp collecting, has been reported (Gelber 1992). Empirical research on makers and tinkerers includes allotment gardening (Crouch 1993), dollhouse building and model railroading (Olmstead 1993), and do-it-yourself (Gelber 1997). The study of the players in sports and games includes serious participation in Contract Bridge (Scott and Godbey 1992; 1994). The realm of activity participation includes Australian bushwalking (Hamilton-Smith 1993), Canadian barbershop singing (Stebbins 1996), and Civil War reenactments (Mittelstaedt 1995). The study of civil war reenactment from the perspective of serious leisure needs some close examination because of its relevance to the study presented here. Mittelstaedt identified four distinct characteristics that define this type of adult leisure behavior as serious leisure. First, they are amateur historians who dedicated to reading and learning in order to provide an accurate depiction of Civil War events. Second, they tend to devote a sizable investment of time and money in order to meet the standards of authenticity. Third, they are willing to persevere a myriad of inconvenience and hardships. Fourth, they may fall into the category of amateur actors trying to reenact Civil War.

A liberal art hobby, defined as “the systematic pursuit during free time of knowledge for its own sake” (Stebbins 1994: 175), can be differentiated from other serious leisure pursuits by two distinctive characteristics: the search for broad knowledge of an area of human life and the search for the knowledge for its own sake. Recently, cultural tourism (Stebbins 1996; 1997a) and lifelong learning (Ian Jones and Symon 2001) were added to the liberal art hobby.

### Career volunteering

Volunteers, the third basic type, represent individuals in volunteering which is “an uncoerced helping activity that is engaged in not primarily for financial gain and not by coercion or mandate” (Van Til 1988: 6). Within the framework of serious leisure, it indicates a volunteering in which the participant can find a career. Relatively little attention has been given to this area.

### **Qualities of serious leisure**

Through extensive ethnographic research, Stebbins (1979) identified six unique qualities that contrast serious leisure from casual leisure, which are not necessarily conceptually independent but interrelated to some extent. First, serious leisure participants are willing to persevere through adversity. From the exchange perspective, it has been proposed that individuals compare the main costs and rewards accompanying the chosen leisure pursuits. Continuing participation in serious leisure occurs when the perceived benefits outweigh the costs accompanied by the moments of difficulty (Stebbins 1992). Second, participants tend to find a career path in their chosen leisure pursuit that evolves with various achievements. The essence of the career resides in the temporal continuity of the activities associated with it. It has been known that serious leisure participants usually go through five career stages: beginning, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Third, serious leisure requires significant personal effort that results in attaining special knowledge and skills associated with the chosen leisure pursuit. Fourth, participants tend to identify with eight durable benefits from the chosen leisure activity. These include self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, sense of belongingness, social interaction, and lasting physical products. Fifth, participants develop a unique ethos that consists of its own subcultural norms, values, and beliefs. Strauss (1978) refers to social world as “groups with shared commitments to certain activities sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals.” Drawing upon the social world perspective (Shibutani 1955; Unruh 1980), Stebbins (1993) suggested an evolution of strong subculture associated with the chosen leisure activity. That is, serious leisure activities tend to serve as a catalyst to develop a unique social organization which is not necessarily delineated by spatial, territorial, formal, or membership boundaries (Unruh 1980). There are four types of participation in every social world by the level of involvement: strangers, tourists, regulars, and insiders. The strangers indicate those who maintain minimal contacts with the given social world. Tourists are temporary participants in a social world. They participate in the social

world momentarily for entertainment, diversion, and profit. Stebbins (2001) speculates that most amateur and hobbyist activities have publics of some kind which can be classified as tourists. The regulars routinely participate in the social world. From the serious leisure perspective, most of amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers fall into this category. The insiders are those who show exceptional devotion to the social world. Stebbins (1992), through the studies of amateurs, identified such types of people and classified them as “devotees” in contrast to “participants” or regulars. The involvement of social world with unique subculture can be found in nearly every type of serious leisure pursuits except the recently identified category of liberal arts hobby (Stebbins 1994). Sixth, participants tend to strongly identify with their chosen leisure activity and to “to speak proudly, excitedly and frequently about them” (Stebbins 1992: 7).

### **Identity and serious leisure**

Several qualities that define serious leisure imply a significant association between the chosen leisure pursuit and its impact on participants’ identity formation. Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak (2002) also contended that serious leisure provides a source of identity and a sense of belonging in an increasingly fragmented postmodern society.

An identity is a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is (Burke and Tully 1977). The set of meanings assigned to the self acts as a reference for future behavior. Identity theory, rooted in the symbolic interaction tradition, postulates the reciprocal relationship between self and society (Blumer 1969) and views the self as a set of discrete identities reflecting roles played in differentiated networks of interaction (Stryker 1980). That is, the identity theory suggests that the self should be regarded as a multifaceted social construct rather than as an autonomous psychological entity which is independent of and prior to society. Thus, the multiple components of self are regarded as identities. It should be noted that identities are reflexive in nature in that they acquire self-meanings only through social interaction (Burke and Reitzes 1981).

Identities are acquired and sustained in reciprocal role relationships.

Constructing a particular identity involves role taking and role making that occurs within a social structure (Goffman 1961). Similarly, Burke (1980) suggested that people have distinctive components of self which correspond to each of the role positions in society that people occupy. We have a relatively distinct social self for each role that we are assigned to or play. When we personalize these roles, they become identities (Stryker 1980). As people tend to be involved in diverse social relationships and thus diverse role expectations, people have multiple identities. It is assumed that variations in self-concepts and thus multiple identities are due to the different roles that people occupy (Stryker 1980).

Identity theory claims that the multiple identities involved in the self-concept will be organized in a hierarchy of salience. Thus, identity salience can be defined as “the importance of an identity for defining one’s self relative to other identities the individual holds” (Shamir 1992: 302). The notion of identity salience is distinguishable from the other related construct such as role-person merger (Turner 1978). Identity salience focuses on the likelihood of invoking identities across a variety of social situations while role-person merger more strongly focuses on the person’s perception of the importance or significance of the identity relative to other identities (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995). The consequence of identity salience is multi-faceted. From behavioral perspective, salient identities are likely to engender role-congruent behavior although in some cases the choice of behavior is solely determined by the nature of the situation because of too strong contextual demands (Stryker 1968). That is, the salient activities can have a significant motivational impact on related activities; if one knows who one is, then he knows how to behave. Salient identities also have affective outcomes. Enactment of salient identities has more powerful effects on a person’s self-meaning and self-esteem than do identities lower in the hierarchy (Thoits 1991). In addition, identity salience may have an impact on social relationships. Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) proposed that salient identities might be associated with the positive evaluations of others who occupy the same role. In turn, the number and importance of social relationships

embedded in a particular role identity may affect the salience of that identity; the person's commitment to a certain role determines the salience of the particular identity (Stryker 1980). Commitment to a particular role identity is high if people perceive that the role involves many important social relationships and deserting such a role results in a loss of social network which is important for self-concept and for self-esteem (Hoelter 1983). Thus, the salience of an identity reflects the level of social commitment to the role underlying that identity. Previous empirical research showed that identity salience is related to positive feelings associated with the identity and thus positively influences individuals' activity selection (Hoelter 1983).

Kelly (1983: 97) states that "There is something about the (leisure) activity that provides the right context for the working out of identities". Similarly, Urry (1994: 235) comments that "Identity is formed through consumption and play. People's social identities are increasingly formed not through work, whether in the factory or the home, but through their patterns of consumption of goods, services and signs". As these assertions indicate, the role of leisure activities in constructing individuals' identity appears to be significant. Schlenker (1984) proposed five processes of constructing the sense of identity; 1) selective participation in occupations, tasks, and hobbies associated with particular self images; 2) displays of signs and symbols of identities through possessions; 3) selective affiliation with others who appraise and support desired identities; 4) interpersonal behaviors designed to shape identity affirming responses in others; and 5) cognitive processes such as selective attention and interpretation of self-referent information. These processes can be more easily enacted within the context of leisure because of relative autonomy and freedom embedded in leisure activities.

The identity constructing process suggests two significant components that are distinguished in leisure activities in relation to identity formation: perceived freedom and social commitment. First, it is related to the relative autonomy embedded in leisure. Leisure has been viewed as an arena where people have relatively few constraints on matching the perceived and the ideal self compared to ordinary, everyday situations (Haggard and Williams 1992). Thus, leisure identities and occupational identities are

often assumed to be opposite. The concept of self can be categorized into two distinctive types: perceived self and ideal self. Human beings are motivated to bring the perceived self into congruence with the subjective ideal self. Freely performed behaviors such as leisure activities allow individuals to construct situations that will affirm the image they desire. That is, leisure activities often allow us to select and even construct what aspects of our selves we wish to project at any given time. Therefore, it can be argued that leisure identities represent ideal selves we desire to project without many constraints. The next component is related to social commitment. Commitment can be divided into two distinctive levels: commitment to activities and commitment to social relationships evolved around the activities. Identity salience is positively associated with the level of participation in identity related activities (Laverie 1998).

It has been known that the salient identities can have a significant motivational impact on the related activities (Laverie and Arnett 2000). Several characteristics of serious leisure seem to strengthen the relationship between leisure participation and identity salience. First, serious leisure always involves a great deal of commitment (e.g., perseverance, a significant personal effort based on special knowledge, training, or skill, and involvement of social world associated with the chosen leisure pursuit). As manifested in identity theory, the degree of social commitment that participants make is positively associated with the salience of the identity related to the activity. Shamir (1992) empirically found that identity salience is related to the level of effort and skill invested in the leisure activity. Accordingly, the identity associated with the serious leisure activity become more salient than other identities. Second, serious leisure activities are often socially visible although some types of serious leisure such as liberal arts hobbies (Stebbins 1994) may not be the case. The social visibility of leisure participation allows significant others to appraise the value of the leisure pursuit and related identity. The positive affirmation of identity by significant others can lead to enhancement of self-esteem and positive emotional feelings about the chosen activity (Burke 1991; Hoelter 1983). In turn, the positive emotional feelings associated with the activity can reinforce the related identity. Third, self-expressive function of leisure



appears to be related to the identity salience in serious leisure. What people choose to do in their leisure time has much to do with how they see themselves as individuals and as members of groups (Kelly 1983). The concept of self has been viewed as two components: the perceived self and ideal self. Freely chosen activities such as leisure activities permit to project an ideal self because of the voluntary nature of the participation. Kelly (1983) postulates that identities assumed in leisure may reflect different images of the self. Accordingly, serious leisure can be viewed as a forum where participants project desired identity that may not be allowed in everyday work situations. Fourth, identity salience in serious leisure may be related to the feeling of mastery. As much of the literature in serious leisure suggests, a feeling of mastery over the chosen leisure pursuit is one of the significant components that defines serious leisure, which may enable participants to experience “flow”. Kiewa (2001), through her study of rock climbers, found that perceptions of control over oneself and the structure of the activity contributed to a desired identity.

In sum, serious leisure is related to the notion of self-expression, social commitment, and positive self-image reinforced by immediate social circles around the activity. Stebbins (2001)’s contention that serious leisure activities act as a source for identities can be understood as a function of those interrelated components inherent in serious leisure. Particularly, he views serious leisure as a central life interest which generates a special form of life style associated with the chosen leisure pursuit. Dubin (1992) defines a central life interest as “that portion of a person’s total life in which energies are invested in both physical/intellectual activities and in positive emotional states”. Serious leisure can be viewed as a behavioral expression of the participants’ central life interests in the chosen leisure pursuit. A leisure identity arises in parallel with a person’s leisure-based central life interest. This reiterates the notion that identities require self-expression and positive feelings affirming the identity (McCall and Simmons 1966).

### **Continuity of serious leisure: Costs and rewards**

The fundamental question regarding serious leisure resides in why do people continue to participate in a given leisure activity. Indeed, to understand the meaning of such leisure for participants is in significant part to understand their motivation for the pursuit (Stebbins 2001b). Stebbins (1992) attempted to answer this question from a social exchange framework. The concept of exchange suggests that people assess costs and rewards accruing to the given leisure activity and their motivation to continue is sustained as long as rewards outweigh the costs. In particular, the rewards of a serious leisure pursuit are the routine values that attract and hold its enthusiasts and every serious leisure career can be framed by the continuous search for the rewards. Previous empirical studies have generated a distinctive set of rewards for each leisure activity examined. The identified rewards can be interpreted as the meaning of the activity for the participant and his or her motivation for engaging in it. It should be noted that the set of rewards is different from the idea of durable benefits in that the latter emphasizes outcomes rather than the antecedent conditions. The rewards accompanying serious leisure can be stratified into personal level and social level (Stebbins 2001b). On a personal level, there are seven identified rewards: self-actualisation (developing skills, abilities, knowledge), self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge), enhanced self-image (known to others as a particular kind of serious leisure participant), self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction), self-enrichment (cherished experiences), and re-creation (regeneration of oneself through serious leisure after a day's work). The weight of each benefit appears to vary along the different serious leisure activities. For instance, Stebbins (1996) found personal enrichment as the most powerful reward in barbershop singing. Overall, most serious leisure participants identified self-enrichment and self-gratification as number 1 and number 2 rewards accompanying the pursuit of a given serious leisure activity (Stebbins 2001b). On a social level, it encompasses social interaction, group effort or accomplishment, and contribution to the maintenance and development of the group. Also, serious leisure is likely to offer attractive social identities. Gibson et al (2002)'s

study of University of Florida football fans illustrated these social benefits. The attainment of family time and the friendships that they had developed through the years was identified as a major benefit of being a fan. Moreover, it was found that social experiences constructed through football games provide a sense of meaning to their lives and serve as a powerful identity source.

The costs associated with serious leisure are activity specific. In general, the commonly identified costs include disappointments, dislikes, and tensions (Stebbins 1992). Baldwin and Norris (1999), through the study of the serious leisure experience for American Kennel Club activity participants, found monetary, time constraint, and negative emotional experiences which were associated with living arrangements respondents integrated into a “dog person” lifestyle. Previous studies (Baldwin and Norris 1999; Gillespie, Leffler, and Lerner 2002) also identified that serious leisure pursuits sometimes involve conflicts between family members who do not share the same interest in the chosen leisure activity.

Baldwin and Norris (1999) cast doubt on the efficacy of the rational choice assumption embedded in the exchange framework. They reported that the respondents in the case of AKC study often had difficulty separating benefits and costs although some constraints (additional time or resources required for their pursuits) were described. They also maintained that this logic is inclined to being a tautology because it only implies that participants do what they do owing to rewards accruing to the chosen pursuit. Thus, it was advocated to explore what benefits they value most instead of identifying singular cause and effect attributions. The strong emotional tie to the animal and qualities inherent in that relationship was identified as the most valued reward for the respondents in their study.

The review of serious leisure literature reveals that there is little emphasis on the possible connection between serious leisure and tourism. The previous studies on serious leisure tend to focus only on the contexts of everyday leisure activities. While understanding the nature of serious leisure activities occurring within everyday life contexts is certainly an important task, it is equally valuable and imperative to

understand a form of serious leisure occurring outside the realm of everyday life. That is, examining tourism activities from the perspective of serious leisure contributes not only to the theory of serious leisure but also to understanding a special form of involvement in tourism activities.

It is widely accepted that leisure and tourism activities allow one to dissociate with the negative qualities (e.g., anxiety, restlessness, isolation, and so on) of everyday life, at least temporarily. This implies that the concept of alienation, as an underlying force, may be a key aspect to understand one's engagement in leisure and tourism activities. The following section briefly reviews the concept of alienation, using both tourism and social psychology literature.

### **Alienation**

Tourism and participation in the other modern alternatives to everyday life may serve for the modern individuals to overcome their alienating experience in everyday life. For example, the act of sightseeing is a kind of involvement with social appearances that helps the person to construct totalities from his disparate experiences (McCannell 1989: 15). Since McCannell (1976) proposed that tourism is a search for authenticity in response to the fragmented and alienated experiences of modernity, the notion of alienation has emerged as an explanation of underlying force for diverse tourism phenomena. Dann (1981) also supported McCannell's view by introducing the concept of 'anomie' as a sociological force behind tourism phenomena. However, Bruner (1991), through his study of international tourists at Third World countries, challenged MacCannell's thesis that alienated Western persons search for authentic experience from elsewhere. His study revealed that most tourists were quite satisfied with their own society. Cohen (1979)'s tourism experience typology suggests that tourism is not always motivated by alienating experience but by varying existence of spiritual center. According to this typology, the existence of spiritual center in the host society tends to determine the type of tourism experience sought for. The term, "spiritual center," refers to the existence of alienation tourists perceive toward the home

society. Simply speaking, if they have a spiritual center at home society, they are not alienated in a sense. Hence, they are not likely to seek for authentic experience from elsewhere. On the other hand, if they do not have such a spiritual center, they are alienated from their home society. Thus, they will seek for the authentic experience lacking in their everyday life.

As shown, the concept of alienation has been implicitly placed at the center of the tourism phenomena. Although the alienation has been one of the most prevalent themes in several disciplines of social sciences, the adequate discussion of the concept has rarely been conducted particularly in tourism literature. Much literature seems to approach it not as a type of subjective experience but as an entity embedded in modern social structure.

### **Social psychological experience of alienation**

From social psychological perspective, Seeman (1959, 1983, and 1991) suggested that there exist multiple dimensions of alienation subjectively experienced by individuals. Consequently, he identified six dimensions of alienation that are not necessarily interconnected. These are: 1) powerlessness, 2) meaninglessness, 3) normlessness, 4) social isolation, 5) cultural disengagement, and 6) self-estrangement. The first dimension, powerlessness, refers to a lack of control over an individual's own course of action. The second dimension of alienation, meaninglessness, refers to a lack of understanding of the individual's own situation and thereby a failure to predict the outcome of his behavior. The third category, normlessness, is associated with the notion of anomie that may be derived from the loss of social solidarity in Durkheim's theory. In the individual, it is manifested as a state of uncertainty and insecurity. The fourth dimension, social isolation, refers to the person's sense of exclusion or lack of social acceptance, manifested typically in feelings of loneliness or feelings of rejection as opposed to belonging. The fifth category, cultural disengagement, refers to the person's sense of removal from the dominant values in society. The last dimension, self-estrangement, is further diversified into three distinctive ways: 1) the despised self

(referring to negative self-esteem), 2) the disguised self (referring to the failure to realize one's true feelings, capacities, and interests), and 3) the detached self (referring to the engagement in activities that are not intrinsically rewarding). With the exception of self-estrangement, the other five dimensions of alienation refer to alienation from outward concrete or abstract aspect of his/her environment: work, institutions, nature, other people, different socio-cultural structure, etc. On the other hand, the concept of self-estrangement indicates alienation from self.

The concept of alienation is closely associated with the issue of authenticity, one of the pivotal concepts in tourism literature. The contention that alienated modern individuals search for authentic experiences through tourism activity may be the most widely debated issue within tourism literature. That is, the issue of alienation requires one to understand the concept of authenticity, and vice versa. Hence, the brief review of tourism authenticity was presented below.

### **Authenticity**

Since McCannell's (1976) seminal thesis that tourism represents the modern individuals' ritualistic quest for authenticity that lacks in their everyday life, authenticity has emerged as a crucial concept in understanding tourist motivation and experience. The significant research attention to the concept of authenticity within the context of tourism has produced an extensive body of literature with various perspectives (Bruner 1994; Cohen 1988; Crang 1996; Selwyn 1997; Taylor 2001; Wang 1999; 2000). Recently, Wang (1999) attempted to categorize the concept of authenticity into three distinctive domains: objectivism, constructivism, and existentialism. The review of the authenticity concept follows Wang's categorization and related literature is presented along each category.

#### **Objective authenticity**

Objective authenticity refers to "the authenticity of originals" (Wang 1999: 351). It pertains to whether toured objects are historically accurate or not. There exists a huge

body of literature dealing with this type of authenticity. Across the literature, the definition of authenticity is usually equated with terms such as accurate, genuine, real, true, or actual. Boorstin (1964) denigrated modern mass tourism phenomena as “pseudo-events” that resulted from extreme commoditization and contriving of tourism attractions. The well-contrived imitation or image seems better than the original. Tourists, according to him, also prefer this contrived image to the original. His conception of pseudo-events reflects the idea of objective authenticity because it implies that tourist authentic experience is determined by the originality of toured objects.

McCannell’s (1976) main thesis that modern tourists are in search of authentic experience seems to equate the concept of authenticity with the objective quality of toured objects. McCannell’s conceptualization of authenticity connotes traditional culture and origin, and a sense of the genuine. He maintains that authentic experiences are only achieved through the sacred or primitive quality of foreign culture or place. That is, he ascribed the authentic to objects, other times, and places as if there is an original quality of such objects. However, he continued to argue, the quest for authenticity by contemporary individuals is doomed to eventual failure because of “staged authenticity”. The concept of “staged authenticity” was derived from Goffman’s (1959) dichotomy of front and back stage. It suggests that tourism events are necessarily contrived events for tourists. The back stage where authenticity resides is not accessible to tourists. Hence, tourists’ experiences are destined to be inauthentic. Clearly, the concept of authenticity within this type of specification connotes that the attainment of authentic experience is necessarily dependent upon the quality of toured objects, culture, and place. The conceptualization of authenticity within this tradition presupposes that there exists an original quality that can be evaluated with a certain objective standard.

### **Constructed authenticity**

While the concept of authenticity from objectivism perspective presumes that there exists an original feature of objects, constructivism approach views authenticity not as a static quality of objects but a changing or sometimes modified quality. For example,

Bruner (1994: 398) criticized McCannell's conception of authenticity as "an essentialist vocabulary of origins and reproductions that is central in Western thought". Cohen (1988) advocated the idea of authenticity as a socially constructed concept that is not given but negotiable; authenticity is viewed not as a primitive concept but as a negotiable concept. Specifically, he suggested:

Since authenticity is not a primitive given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence in the eyes of visitors to the host culture. In other words, a cultural product, or a trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic, even by experts... (Cohen 1988: 379).

Hence, he coined the term "emergent authenticity" in contrast to essentialists' conception of authenticity. According to this conceptualization, authenticity should not be judged by some museum experts or academic scholars but by social and cultural context of a given society. For example, he argued that Disneyland or Disney World which may be regarded as artificial, hyperreal, or inauthentic within the objectivism tradition can be conceived of as authentic in its own sense as the authentication of such cultural products are not inherently given but emergent along the given sociocultural context. Salamone (1997) also supported Cohen's conceptualization of "emergent authenticity" by suggesting that nature of culture resides in negotiation and fluidity and authenticity, accordingly, should be judged by a cultural context.

### **Existential authenticity**

The concept of authenticity derived from existentialism is clearly distinguished from the previous two approaches. Both objectivism and constructivism tend to view the concept of authenticity as an object-related quality. Whereas, the authenticity stemming from existentialism indicates a potential existential state of being that may be triggered by tourism activities. According to Wang (1999; 2000), authenticity in both objectivism and constructivism is inherently related to the quality of object. Hence, it is referred to as object-related authenticity. On other hand, existential authenticity is



related to tourists' experience itself. Thereby, it may be referred to as activity-related authenticity. That is, from both objectivism and constructivism perspectives, the attainment of authenticity necessarily depends upon the quality of toured objects while the attainment of existential authenticity has nothing to do with the quality of toured objects. More specifically, a state of existential authenticity can be characterized as the one that:

...comprises personal or intersubjective feelings that are activated by the liminal process of tourist behaviors. In such liminal experiences, people feel that they are themselves much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than they are in everyday life, not because the toured objects are authentic, but rather because they are engaging in non-everyday activities, free from the constraints of daily life. Wang (2000: 49-50)

Existential authenticity indicates an attainment of "true-self" and "true-interpersonal relationship" marginalized to a great extent in everyday public roles. Similar conceptualization of authenticity is also found in Selwin's (1996) distinction between "cool authenticity" and "hot authenticity". While "cool authenticity" implies an objective quality of authenticity such as historical accuracy of toured objects, events, and local cultures, "hot authenticity" indicates "alienation-smashing feeling" or "a sense of authentic selves".

Tourism perceived as a simpler, freer, less utilitarian, and romantic lifestyle helps the individuals keep the distance from or transcend their daily lives. Accordingly, tourists are able to search for authentic-selves that are free from the self-constraints by reason and rationality in modernity. Wang's conception of existential authenticity shares McCannell's (1976) basic premise of a modernity that creates a feeling of alienation that leads to a longing for unified experiences and wholeness. The crucial difference, however, is the nature of authenticity that is sought for. For Wang, it is not an attribute of object, culture, or activity but an experiential state that is ultimately sought for by tourists.

According to him, tourism authentic experiences are divided into intra-personal and inter-personal dimensions. Intra-personal authenticity refers to a state of authentic

self that can be achieved through tourism activities. The intra-personal authenticity can be further diversified into bodily feelings and self-making dimensions. On the other hand, inter-personal authenticity indicates a creation of we-ness feeling between tourists situated in the same spatiotemporal contexts.

#### Intra-personal authenticity: Bodily feelings

Until recently, much tourism literature has limited its focus of tourism experience to the visual mode of consumption (Urry 1990). Although passive nature of visual consumption of spectacular is still very much part of the tourist experience, bodily feelings such as touch, smell, and taste also play a crucial role in shaping tourism experience as contemporary tourism practices become more activity-oriented (Franklin 2003). Consequently, some attention has been given to the role of body in tourism experiences (Cant 2003; Nielsen 2003; Pons 2003). The studies of body and tourism collectively suggest that a researcher needs to take account of the corporeal sense of human body to be able to fully understand diverse forms of tourism experiences. All the touristic languages related to the bodily pleasures encompass relaxation, recreation, excitement, challenge, demand, energetic, sensation-seeking, sensual pleasures, and so on (Wang 1999). Search for such bodily feelings is embedded in many common tourist practices: drinking, eating exotic foods, climbing, horse riding, fishing, bungee jumping, listening to exotic music, and so on. Particularly, a search for sensual experience through relatively unbridled sexual encounters at tourism destinations has often been identified as the prominent motivator for many Western-originated tourists (Harold, Garcia, DeMoya 2001; Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich, and Smeaton 1998; Opperman 1999). As often exemplified in diverse forms of tourism (e.g., sex tourism, beach tourism, and adventure tourism), tourism may offer the possibilities to escape from social rules that oppress the body and allow tourists to attain the bodily pleasures in a more authentic sense.

### Intra-personal authenticity: Self-making

This dimension of existential authenticity pertains to the attainment of self-realization through tourism activities. Wang maintained that constraining and monotonous routines embedded in everyday roles tend to block modern individuals to pursue their self-realization. That is, he presumed that modern individuals are unlikely to realize their authentic selves because of the constraining routinization and over-predictability in everyday life. For him, it is through tourism activity that many modern individuals strive to achieve a sense of authentic self.

### Inter-personal authenticity: Family-ties

Wang (1999; 2000) noted that one of the most significant tourism functions is to reinforce the solidarity among the family members. That is, the joint touristic experiences and the achievement of a sense of togetherness inside the family constitute an important dimension of tourism inter-personal authentic experience.

### Inter-personal authenticity: Tourism communitas

Following the idea of 'communitas' which refers to intense feelings of social togetherness and belonging (Turner 1969), Wang (1999; 2000) suggested that liminal quality of tourism space and time facilitates several primitive ritualistic features in tourists' experiences. The most noticeable element that determines the experience of tourists, according to him, resides in the quality of unmediated interactions based on common humanity. The idea of tourism communitas identified as another important dimension of inter-personal authenticity is similar to the concepts such as a sense of community, brotherhood, a feeling of we-ness, or a sense of collective flow experience.

Until recently, much of literature in tourism has dealt with the object-related authenticity. Particularly, the area of cultural/heritage tourism which encompasses cultural heritage festivals and theme parks has examined the concept of authenticity in light of historical accuracy of cultural artifacts and events being displayed (Chhabra, Healy, and Sills 2003; Waitt 2000). Although object-related authenticity is still an

important element that helps shape tourism motivation and experience particularly within the historic/cultural tourism events, authenticity as an experiential state of Being proposed by Wang (1999; 2000) is also an important but overlooked dimension of tourism experience. The examination of existential authenticity becomes more imperative to understand tourists experiences particularly when the originality of toured objects becomes of less concern for tourists. That is, tourists are repeatedly drawn to a certain tourism place or activity without being concerned with the quality of the tourism objects. It, therefore, may contribute to understanding a ritual quality of tourism practice in a wide variety of contexts. Additionally, Jamal and Hill (2002) suggest that existential authenticity of tourists needs to be understood as a dialectic engagement with the home and the world of tourism.

### **Theory of Ritual Practice**

Another theoretical framework that informed this study is a theory of ritual practice. Festivals and other modern tourism practices often illustrate ritualistic characteristics. For instance, it is often suggested that festival and other tourism practices include the quality of “rites of reversal” that refers to a temporarily recognized and sanctioned period during which existing social norms and statues are suspended (Lett 1983; Passariello 1983). Graburn (2002: 50) also contended that “Tourists on holiday are seeking specific reversals of a few specific features of their workday home life, things that they lack or that advertising has pointed they could better find elsewhere”. Such ritualistic features are well presented in Turner’s notion of liminality (liminoid) and *communitas* developed within a symbolic anthropology tradition. His conceptual notions were originally developed to explain the phases in the tribal ritual processes, which has a strong ramification for analysis of modern pilgrimages and tourism practices. For this reason, the following sections delves into the notions of liminality, liminoid, *communitas*, and other applied studies using these ideas.

## **Liminality**

Arnold Van Gennep (1908; 1960), the French folklorist and ethnographer, coined the term “rites of passage” through analyzing diverse ritual processes across different cultures. It was contended that rites of passage in tribal societies serve to resolve social problems and perpetuate the social order through promoting the integration and socialization of its members (Myerhoff 1982). Thus, it occurs at moments of great anxiety brought by naturally or socially provided crises. Van Gennep showed that all *rites de passage* (rites of passage hereafter) in tribal societies were marked by three phases: separation, limen or margin, and aggregation. In the first phase, ritual subjects are symbolically detached either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from a relatively stable cultural state. In the second phase, upon being detached from their mundane existence, they tend to undergo the intervening transient phase, a state of betwixt and between. Blurring and merging of distinctions in everyday world characterize liminality. Once they consummate the ritual process, they return to mundane social life with elevated or changed social statuses and roles. Gennep perceived that this fundamental tripartite structure is determined by the necessity for functionally separating the person from one status before incorporating him or her into a new one. In between the departure from the old position and the incorporation into the new one was a transitional or liminal period, now known as liminality”. The liminal period is the most distinctive element that characterizes the tribal ritual.

Following Van Gennep, Turner (1969) closely investigated what Van Gennep identified as the middle phase of these processes, the liminal or threshold stage. According to Turner’s account of rites of passages, ritual subjects are likely to undergo leveling process where signs of their prior status are stripped and signs of liminal (transitional) non-status are applied. Stripping off signs of preliminary status (e.g., clothing, names, and ornaments) indicates a symbolic discontinuation of profane social relations, former rights, and obligations during the rites processes. Borders are crossed; identity symbols stripped away, familiar roles and customs suspended. The social order that existed among ritual subjects may be suspended temporarily at least during the

liminal phase of the ritual. Thus, the distinctive characteristics of liminality in the tribal rituals can be described as following: sexlessness, anonymity submissiveness to an authority (often total community) and silence.

The concept of liminality can be analytically distinguished into three components (Turner 1969: 99-108; 1985: 291-301). These are: 1) communication of sacra where secret symbols are communicated to the ritual subjects in the form of sacred articles, actions, and instructions; 2) ludic deconstruction and recombination of familiar cultural artifacts; 3) simplification of the relations of the social structure.

Turner identified two types of liminality. One is the liminality that characterizes rituals of status elevation. Ritual subjects move from a lower to a higher social position accompanying changed statuses and obligations. Another one is related to rituals of status reversal. In this case, groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors (Turner 1969: 167). The stronger are made weaker; the weak act as though they were strong. The liminality of the strong is socially unstructured or simply structured whereas that of the weak represents a fantasy of structural superiority (Turner 1969: 168).

Turner (1982) points out the “ludic” (playful) and subversive aspects of the liminal phase. Without previous social order that has governed their behaviors, ritual subjects tend to play with diverse cultural elements (images, paintings, and dance forms) in a very creative and imaginative way. Play, imagination, and paradox with all its possibilities come to the fore, and along with them, an attitude of mind that is interpretive, self-reflexive, self-conscious. Criticism and awareness are almost inevitable in liminal circumstances (Myerhoff 1982: 117). Individuals under these critical conditions are most often aroused to self-consciousness or brought to the edge of profound self-questioning by the play with the forms (e.g., mirrors, masks, costumes, novelty). Accordingly, it was noted that “free recombinations of cultural elements are the essence of liminality” (Turner 1982: 27). Given this character of liminality phase, the liminal period was perceived as inevitable structural conditions where new cultural

forms (e.g., myths, symbols, philosophical systems, and works of art) are created and recombined. In turn, these newly generated cultural forms provide men with a set of templates, models, or paradigms which reclassify reality of society (Turner 1969). Liminality therefore is conceived of as a counterpart of the structural norm. “Liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the structural norm” (Turner 1969: 47). If liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs (Turner 1969: 167).

The notion of liminality has extended beyond the processual form of the tribal rituals which Van Gennep (1907) originally analyzed by referring to independent and sometimes enduring category of people who are betwixt and between (Myerhoff 1982). To Turner, liminality is not only a phase or space in a rite of passage but a condition or state of being “betwixt and between” (Babcock 2001). Turner (1978: 2) comments:

Liminality is now seen to apply to all phase of decisive cultural change, in which previous orderings of thought and behavior are subject to revision and criticism, when hitherto unprecedented modes of ordering relations between ideas and people become possible and desirable.

It was noticed that the rites of passage which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age occur in any given society. In addition, Turner (1978) contended that groups, age-sets, and social categories as well as individual could undergo transition (liminality). Turner (1982) further expanded the notion of liminality to whole society in order to explain the intervening periods between macro social changes beyond any specific cultural boundary. In this sense, liminality was described as “occurring during transitional periods of history when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape” (Turner 1982: 1). At such transitional times the “subjunctive mood of culture” may prevail. That is, the word “liminality” can be metaphorically applied to other aspects of culture and even whole society (Turner 1982).

## **Liminoid**

The hallmarks of ritual in tribal society can be characterized as a total participation of whole community, obligation, and playful cultural events. A ritual in tribal society is different from contemporary sense of work in that it has an element of play. In tribal society, liminality is often functional. Its very reversals and inversions tend to compensate for rigidities or unfairnesses of normative structure. Liminality, a seclusion phase, is used as a period to invent ludic events for the whole community. With the advent of industrialized society, leisure emerged an alternative to liminality of tribal society. In modern society, leisure is conceived of as one type of ritual outside the religious domain, which is individualized to certain specific groups. Turner (1982: 46) notes that:

In tribal societies, liminality provides a propitious setting for the development of these direct, immediate, and total confrontations of human identities. In industrial societies, it is within leisure, and sometimes aided by the projections of art that this way of experiencing one's fellows can be portrayed, grasped, and sometimes realized.

As briefly mentioned, liminoid is the term coined by Turner (1969) to distinguish transitional experience of obligatory rituals from that of voluntary leisure sphere. Liminoid experiences “develop apart from the central economic and political processes, along the margins, in the interfaces and interstices of central and serving institutions—they are plural, fragmentary, and experimental in character” (Turner 1983: 158). Thus, he typified both tribal rituals and religious rituals in modern society as liminal, while rituals in the leisure domain of modern society were termed liminoid. That is, understanding of distinction between leisure and work in modern sense is crucial to comprehend the liminoid phenomena differentiated from the liminality phenomena.

In traditional societies (before Industrial Revolution), the area between work and leisure was blurred in nearly all aspects of life (Cross 1990). Rituals in particular are the ones intermingled with work and play. For instance, performance of ritual is closely



connected to increasing fertility of men, crops, and animals, and to curing illness, to turning children to adults, and so forth. Although many tribal rituals may involve ludic (playful) events, these were not conceived of as leisure in a modern sense. Turner (1974a) contended that the main distinction of the work and ritual in tribal society is between sacred and profane work, not between work and leisure. Conversely, work in tribal societies (pre-Industrial Revolution societies) is not work, but has in both sacred and profane dimensions, an element of play. Turner (1978) noticed that a mechanical system of postindustrial societies clearly separates the sphere of leisure and work. Leisure was conceived of as an artifact of the Industrial Revolution whereas rituals of tribal societies were regarded as cultural activities in which work and play are inherently interwoven.

For Turner (1982), leisure events and tourism activities are the medium that offer the transitional experience for individuals in modern industrialized society where the source of liminality (ritual) is disappeared. Turner (1974a: 68) views leisure as “...freedom to transcend social structural limitations, freedom to play—with ideas, with fantasies, with words...and with social relationships”. Turner (1982) identified strong similarities between liminal elements of tribal rituals and the genres of industrial leisure (film, sport, novel, rock music, art, etc.) in that both play with the factors of culture in random, surprising, usually experimental combinations. However, people perform industrial leisure in a much more complicated way than in the liminality of tribal initiations. He regarded those commercialized leisure products that attempt to justify the prevailing social and cultural customs and orders as ‘pseudo liminal’ rather than ‘liminoid’

Turner (1982: 84-87) noted crucial differences between the liminal phenomena in tribal (or agrarian ritual) and the liminoid phenomena (or leisure genres of symbolic forms and actions) in industrial societies:

- 1) Liminal phenomena are obligatory in nature. All the acts and symbols in liminal period are of obligation. Liminoid phenomena, on the other hand, are inherently

voluntary. These obligatory and voluntary aspects are the ones that fundamentally distinguish liminoid from liminality.

- 2) Liminal phenomena are a temporal transition whose properties partially invert already established social and cultural norms. Thus, although they might look subversive in appearance, the real function of liminality is to maintain social and cultural norms of the society. Liminoid phenomena on the contrary tend to be subversive.
- 3) Liminal phenomena tend to predominate in tribal and early agrarian societies possessing mechanical solidarity and dominated by status. On the other hand, liminoid phenomena flourish in society possessing organic solidarity. Liminoid phenomena characterize the democratic-liberal societies.
- 4) Liminal phenomena tend to be collective, concerned with social-structural rhythms or with crises in social processes. Thus, they are likely to be enforced by sociocultural necessity. Liminoid phenomena are characteristically individual products although they often have collective effects. They are not cyclical and occur in places assigned to leisure activities.
- 5) Liminal phenomena are centrally integrated into the total social process. Liminoid phenomena arise apart from the central economic and political processes.
- 6) Liminal phenomena tend to project collective representations. Symbols have a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all the members of the group. Liminoid phenomena tend to be more quirky and idiosyncratic. Symbols tend to compete each other for general recognition. Their symbols are closer to the personal-psychological than to the objective-social typological pole.
- 7) Liminal phenomena tend to be functional even when seemingly inverse for the social structure. Liminoid phenomena are often parts of social critiques or even revolutionary manifestos.

In addition, liminoid phenomena tend to be the leisure genres practiced by and for particular segments of large-scale industrial societies of all types. As leisure is often

conceived of as commercial products, liminoid is more like a commodity which one selects and pays for, whereas liminality tends to elicit loyalty and is bound up with one's membership in some highly corporate group. Thus, in modern era, the liminality tends to be bound with work sphere while the liminoid is likely to indicate play (leisure) sphere. The liminality involved with ritual seems to be diminishing in modern society in favor of the liminoid. In sum, the liminoid phenomena indicate those socially accepted and approved activities which seem to deny the legitimacy of the institutionalized statuses, roles, norms, values, and rules of everyday life.

### **Communitas**

Following transitional phase (liminality or liminoid), individuals in ritual process tend to form *communitas*. *Communitas* is defined as “a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes” (Turner 1973: 216). Thus, *communitas*, should be understood as temporary unmediated communal human relationship constructed through liminality or liminoid phase. It is a special sense of togetherness that exists outside social structure or *habitus* in Bourdieu (1984)'s term. The notion of *communitas* is not confined to tribal ritual process. Turner (1974b) contends that it can be metaphorically applied to other social and cultural phenomena. Indeed, the values of *communitas* are present in modern Western society: hippies, teeny-boppers. They stress personal relationships rather than social obligations, and regard sexuality as a polymorphic instrument of immediate *communitas* rather than as the basis for an enduring structured social tie (Turner 1969: 112). It resists social structure by providing a contrast or alternative to it.

The features of *communitas* are related to its liberating and temporary relationship among individuals within the group. As Turner (1969) indicates it as “moments in and out of time,” it can be conceived of as transcendental state of being or the collective spatial and temporal dimension occupied by liminal personae. *Communitas* has no specific territorial locus. It is spontaneous, immediate, and abstract in nature whereas social structure is norm-governed, institutionalized, and concrete. Turner (1974a) attempts to link Csikszentmihalyi (1972)'s concept of flow to the notion

of *communitas*. It was contended that *communitas* has something of “flow” quality and often arise spontaneously. However, he pointed out that *communitas* could be experienced between or among individuals while flow could be experienced within an individual. He viewed “flow” as one of the ways to transform structure into *communitas*. In tribal society, rituals provide a way to experience flow for total communities. After Industrial Revolution, leisure activities have taken over the ritual function to generate flow experience for voluntary participants.

It should be noticed that the term “*communitas*” refers to neither regression to infancy, nor emotional state, nor merging in fantasy. It is a bonding relationship based on equal status among individuals while preserving individual distinctiveness (Turner 1982). Therefore, the bonds of *communitas* are characterized by a spirit of fraternity and comradeship not constrained by any social obligation, status, or role (Turner 1974a: 47). It is also important to notice that inclusiveness characterizes *communitas*, whereas exclusiveness or snobbishness characterizes social structure. Another distinctive characteristics of *communitas* resides in its transitory existence. The spontaneity and immediacy of *communitas* can seldom be sustained for long. There is a paradox to “*communitas*”. Once it was a liberating form of society, it soon becomes institutionalized, generating another set of social roles and statuses within the spontaneously created community. A state of *communitas* develops structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships.

Reflecting on this paradoxical nature of *communitas*, Turner (1982) proposed two distinctive forms of *communitas* which could be understood as sequential and evolving phases: spontaneous (ideological) *communitas* and normative *communitas*. First, a spontaneous *communitas* is where a deep style of personal interaction occurs. It is a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition. Individuals in the mode of spontaneous *communitas* interact with each other based on mutual understanding. They are free from culturally defined burdens such as role, status, and reputation. For this absence of elements of social structure, it can also be labeled as structureless

communitas. The structureless communitas can bind and bond people together only momentarily (Turner 1969: 153). Second, normative communitas indicates an evolved phase of spontaneous communitas in which individuals attempt to maintain spontaneous relationships on a permanent basis. Although there arise strict regulations or norms as it evolves, something of freedom, liberation, or love still adheres to normative communitas. Turner (1982) speculated that such transformation of communitas might occur because groups feel themselves vulnerable to the institutionalized groups surrounding them, thus attempt to institutionalize the spontaneously created group.

There exists a similar notion to communitas in other modern intellectuals' works. For instance, Maffessoli (1991)'s concept of neo-tribalism also resembles the notion of communitas in that both indicate temporary formation of emotional community to some extent. Neo-tribalism indicates an instant community constructed through products of contemporary consumer culture. He argues that individuals in consumer society actively seek for this instant emotional experience of belonging. This implicitly indicates the close connection between liminoid (centered on leisure phenomena) and communitas experience in modern society. The notion of communitas goes beyond the tribal ritual processes. Turner viewed it as the counter part of social structure that completes society. Thus, communitas was also equated with the notion of "anti-structure" as opposed to "structure".

### **Structure and anti-structure**

Turner repeatedly emphasized the importance of the liminal (intermediate phase in ritual) and communitas. These concepts go beyond the boundary of some tribal rituals and are applicable to diverse phenomena in complex societies. Turner (1969) viewed the concepts of liminality and communitas as anti-structure existing in relation to social structure. For Turner, social structure was viewed as a distinctive arrangement of specialized mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of positions, while anti-structure is conceived of as liberating, transcendental, and spontaneous part of social life. In other words, one is of society as a structure of

political, economic positions, offices, statuses, and roles, in which the individual is only ambiguously grasped behind the social persona. This is of a differentiated, culturally structured, and often hierarchical system of institutionalized positions. The other is of society as a state of *communitas* where individuals face each other as equal in terms of shared humanity. This society is represented as an undifferentiated and homogeneous whole in which individuals confront one another integrally without being segmented into statuses and roles. Also, it can be said that *communitas* is of now whereas structure is derived from the past and extends into the future through law and custom. Turner (1969) maintained that the ultimate desire of society is to act in terms of *communitas* values even while playing social-structural roles (where social deeds are conceived of as merely instrumental to the aim of attaining and maintaining *communitas*).

Regarding society as a process rather than an abstract system, Turner argues (1969: 97) that social life is “a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality.” No society can function adequately without this dialectic. Each social system has structural and anti-structural adaptive functions. All human societies implicitly or explicitly are comprised of two contrasting social models: structure and anti-structure (*communitas*). They together made up “one stream of life” (Turner 1969: 140). However, they are not independent each other. Anti-structure can be grasped only in some relation to structure. Anti-structure (*communitas*) emerges where social structure is not (Turner 1969). They complement each other in constructing social life. Turner (1969: 129) summarized this complementary function between *communitas* and social structure.

There is a dialectic here, for the immediacy of *communitas* gives way to the mediacy of structure, while, in *rites de passage*, men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic...Maximization of *communitas* provokes maximization of structure, which in its turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed *communitas*. The history of any great society provides evidence at the political level for this oscillation.

Common criticisms to Turner reside in his ambiguous definitions of the notions discussed here (Bilu 1988). There exists anti-communitas among pilgrims. Turner underestimated the complexity of human relationship and experience. The simple dichotomy of communitas and structure cannot explain complex nature of social phenomena. For example, pilgrimage as a diversified, multilayered phenomenon, it may encompass a wide range of inner experiences. His contention appears to be a quest for religious ideal rather than an explanation of social phenomena as he moves on.

### **Pilgrimage and tourism**

Turner, as discussed previously, believed that the notions of liminality, liminoid, and communitas originally conceived of as phases in ritual process have a strong ramification to modern social phenomena. Therefore, Turner (1973), in accordance with his continuing interest in ritual and religion, attempted to interpret modern pilgrimage within the notions of liminality, liminoid, and communitas. Accordingly, Turner and Turner (1978) viewed pilgrimage as one type of Western rituals that can be metaphorically compared to rituals in tribal societies. They argue that Industrial Revolution encourages liminoid to emerge in modern pilgrimage while discouraging liminal elements. That is, modern pilgrimages are more voluntary in nature than the archaic or medieval ones. Individuals in modern pilgrimages are more likely to seek for liminoid experience and subsequent communitas. Thus, pilgrimages serve to produce a world where communitas is preeminent. More specifically, they pointed out several similarities between pilgrimage and tribal rituals. These include: release from mundane structure; homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behavior; communitas; ordeal; reflection on the meaning of basic religious and cultural values; emergence of the integral person from multiple personae; movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery which transiently becomes central for the individual (Turner and Turner 1978: 34).

There are, however, significant differences between them. First, the experience in pilgrimage is of the individual whereas ritual is more centered on collective experience. Second, the goal in tribal initiations tends to be the attainment of a new sociocultural status and role, which eventually facilitates and supports existing social structure they reside in. Whereas, pilgrimage is to increase temporary release or the prospect of ultimate salvation from the profane structural world (the sins and evils) that normally binds them. There is no rise or changed status in the Christian pilgrim experiences but a deeper level of religious participation. Lastly, in many tribal societies rituals such as initiation, which contain extended liminal phases, tend to be obligatory. Tribal rituals in many cases are conducted based on the ties of ascribed status, which indicates individuals in the tribal ritual are structurally interdependent. On the other hand, pilgrimage is voluntary in nature. The relationship among pilgrims is likely to be based on contract, friendship, and voluntary participation. In this sense, pilgrimage may be said to represent the essence of voluntary liminality. This voluntary aspect of pilgrimage strongly distinguishes it from the typical tribal rituals that are identified with obligation and thus conceived of as an extension of work. Turner (1974b), for this reason, argued that pilgrimage could be best thought of as “liminoid” or “quasi-liminal” rather than “liminal” in Van Gennep’s sense. Turner’s interpretation of pilgrimage as a modern ritual received both acclaim and criticism. Criticisms are related to the use of terms and the concern with empirical research. That is, critiques in general contend that several core terms (e.g., liminality, liminoid, *communitas*) are too ambiguous to apply for empirical situations. Also, they argue that the simple interpretation of pilgrimage as anti-structure appear to ignore the complexity and variance that exist within modern pilgrims (Bilu 1988). On the other hand, supporters of Turnerian perspective claim that his interpretation of pilgrimage should be understood as “representative of a particular discourse about pilgrimage rather than as an empirical description of it, one which might well co-exist or compete with alternative discourses” (Eade 1991: 5).

However, Turner’s interpretation of pilgrimage provided a great opportunity for tourism researcher to approach tourism phenomena. For instance, Turner (1973) showed



a possible linkage between tourism and pilgrimage through his notions of liminality, *communitas*, and *inversal*. Later, Turner and Turner (1978) claimed that pilgrimage entails the movement of people from their everyday world of structured roles and statuses to a sacred center which indicates a world of *communitas* or anti-structure. This interpretation led them to describe the modern pilgrimage as blended with tourism. Tourists move from a familiar place (home environment) to a far place (attraction) and returns to the familiar place (home) (Cohen 1988). That is, the tourist's respectful visits to attractions resemble the pilgrim's ascent to the "Center Out There." (Turner 1973). . Graburn (1989: 22) also describes the similarities between pilgrimage and tourism, as "functionally and symbolically equivalent to other institutions that human beings use to embellish and add meaning to their lives." This indicates a close linkage between Turnerian perspective and tourism phenomena in general. Therefore, Turner's theory regarding structure of culture has provided a framework to interpret tourism experience and invited several tourism scholars to explore the possible linkages (Graburn 1983; Lett 1983).

### **Liminality, liminoid, *communitas* and tourism**

Regarding tourism phenomena as one type of modern ritual (MacCannell 1976), Turner's approach opens new interpretative possibilities on touristic phenomena. Graburn (2000) views tourism as a modern ritual practice and points out similar characteristics between them: renewal of self and instant communion experience. Cohen (1988) asserts that Turner's processual model and his paradigm of the pilgrimage provided a prominent theoretical framework to understand tourism phenomena and become one of the most significant sociological approaches in the field of tourism studies. Cohen (1979)'s typology of tourist adopts Turner (1973)'s idea of center. The degree of seeking for spiritual center is used as a criterion to divide different types of tourists. It is argued that the religious pilgrim's "re-creation" at the Center becomes the secularized "recreation" of the modern tourist (Cohen 1979: 184). This emphasizes the significance of liminal experience for the individual tourist.

Moore (1980) contended that liminal quality of primitive rituals has been resurrected in contemporary U.S. society through tourism and leisure activities such as Walt Disney World that uses fantasy and supernatural elements as a major attraction. He interprets that Walt Disney World evokes supernatural (liminality) in a modern context within which the supernatural has been banished. This indicates the leisure genres take the place of ritual in contemporary U.S. society.

Gottlieb (1982) approaches tourism as an inversion of everyday reality, which reflects the idea of liminality. She shows that vacationers attempt to play social roles in which they are denied in their everyday life. For instance, middle-class tourists attempt to play at being a “Peasant for a Day,” whereas lower-middle-class tourists play at being “King(Queen) for a Day.” For her, tourism is viewed as an opportunity to provide an inversion of total social existence which is also realized in the liminality phase of the ritual. A similar argument is presented in Passariello (1983)’s study of Mexican vacations. He argues that Mexican tourists seek for the role-reversal experience during the vacation, which is something that they cannot attain from their ordinary life. The type of inversion or reversal experience is determined by the structural conditions of the life of a social group or class.

Lett (1983) may be the first researcher who experimented the full application of Turner’s ritual theory to explain tourists’ experience. His study illustrates how charter yacht tourists invert their everyday social roles and statuses and confront each other (between tourists) as free, equal, leveled, and total human beings within a strictly limited spatio-temporal setting, resembling Turner’s “communitas.” He described the essential aspect of behavior in touristic situations as the suspension of everyday obligations, the freedom enjoyed by tourists, and their license for permissive and playful “non-serious” behavior, which stands in sharp contrast to conventions of American-middle class life. Such conduct was viewed as compensatory and temporary inversion, restoring tourists to return to their everyday life by discharging emotional restraint for a while with voluntary leisure and tourism practices. Lett (1983: 54) noted that: “the ludic and liminoid licence provides a temporary release from, but not a permanent alternative to, everyday life.”

The functional aspect of liminality or liminoid experience also can be found in Daniel (1996)'s study of Cuban performing dancers in tourism destination. Daniel (1996: 789) commented that: "As performing dancers, tourists access the magical world of liminality which offers spiritual and aesthetic nourishment. Tourism, in moments of dance performance, opens the door to a liminal world that gives relief from day-to-day, ordinary tensions, and, for Cuban dancers and dancing tourists particularly, permits indulgence in near-ecstatic experiences." This emphasizes the ritual aspect of tourism that helps discharge accumulated emotion and also have transcendental experience. Ryan and Martin (2001) also briefly discussed the relationship between tourists and strippers in night clubs as a liminoid phenomenon in that fantasy, role play, sexual bonding, and voyeurism characterize this relationship; it was conceived of as an experience outside of the norm.

Urry (1990) argued that Romantic gaze which is a search for pure authenticity is gradually supplemented by the Collective gaze which indicates direct and communal types of enjoyment. People derive enjoyment not only from the place they visit but also from the company they keep. Wang (1999) provided a similar view that tourism offers possibilities for liminal experience and subsequent *communitas* (among tourists). However, he attempts to relate the Turner's idea to the notion of authenticity. He contended that authentic self (he terms it as "existential authenticity") referred to an ideal that acts to resist or invert the dominant rational order of the mainstream institutions. Thus, the authentic self is often fulfilled in the space outside the dominant institutions, a space that separates the profane from the sacred, responsibilities from freedom, work from leisure, and the inauthentic public role from the authentic self. That is, existential authenticity (authentic self) can be experienced only within a "liminal zone where one keeps a distance from societal constraints and inverts, suspends, or alters routine order and norms" (Wang 1999: 361). He also connected the idea of *communitas* to the term inter-personal authenticity which refers to unmediated friendship between tourists. Accordingly, *communitas* can be identified with an exceptional experience triggered by interpersonal interaction. Arnold and Price (1993), through their research

on river rafting experience, contended that a sense of *communitas* was not produced merely by shared experience but by a shared intensified edgework occurring through emotional and physical difficulties. This contention suggests that *communitas* can be interpreted as a sense of heightened interpersonal belonging which may be induced by touristic or leisure activities. Within tourism contexts, intensified interpersonal experience often occurs within the same group of tourists given that the level and quality of interaction between hosts and tourists appears to be minimal and superficial. In this vein, not to mention that Turner's original contention regarding the ritual process occurring tribal villages, a sense of *communitas* may be produced within a leisure or tourism group who shares a similar value.

These studies opened up the way to explore liminal touristic phenomena by endowing more concrete and definitive meaning to Turner's otherwise unspecified and abstract terms (e.g., liminality, liminoid, and *communitas*) within tourism context.

### **Symbolic Materials in Rituals and Festivals (Costume and Mask)**

"The re-shaping of consciousness or experience that takes place in ritual is by definition a reorganization of the relationship between the subject and what may for convenience be called reality. Ritual symbolism always operates on both elements, reorganizing (representation of) "reality," and at the same time reorganizing (representation of) self" (Ortner 1978: 9). The use of symbolic artifacts appears to be universal in both tribal and modern sense festivals and rituals.

Among other symbolic artifacts, wearing masks seems to be most common activities found in festivals and rituals. Abraham (1982) argued that the symbolic function of costume (mask) is essential in understanding how the vocabulary of festival operates. It is assumed that wearing masks or any kind of costume may not only signify the meaning of the events but also affect the wearer in a significant way. Thus, the function of costume (mask) in ritual and festival will be briefly discussed in this section. It should be noticed that masking includes various kinds of transforming costume elements (e.g., mask, costume, and face-painting) in the contexts such as ritual drama,

carnival, and New years party. In western culture, it is typically a costume that displays transformed identity, not the mask. In a sense, it can be said that a mask may hide one's real identity while costume serves to display a new identity. However, the function and symbolic meaning of mask and costume are often interchangeably used.

Masking is often defined as “the ritual transformation of the human actor into a being of another order” (Crumrine 1983: 1). Pollock (1995: 582) also regarded masking as “a technique for transforming identity, either through the modification of the representation of identity, or through the temporary – and representational – extinction of identity.” Thus, it is a general consensus that mask or any kind of costume is to transform the identity of wearer. In other words, the mask indicates a symbolic means for the wearer to transcend his/her socially constructed identity (Halpin 1979). It works by concealing or changing signs of identity, and by presenting new values that represent the transformed identity (Pollock 1995). Hence, it can be argued that masking is a socially constructed act. Masking will not work as discussed if there is no shared understanding or agreement between the wearer and audience about what masking socially means. The theater effect should be achieved for the success of masking (transformation of identity). The mask signals for both wearer and audience the disguise of identity and the appearance of transformed identity. That is, masking induces both audience and performers to temporarily suspend disbelief and to collude in the pretence that on-stage events and characters are not unreal.

The purpose of masking cannot be simply described. Even in a single cultural tradition, masks (broadly defined as some form of social “disguise” of the normal self) appear in many different situations and are used for quite diverse social ends (Crocker 1982). Therefore, it can be said that the function of mask or costume is culturally bounded and context specific.

Mask or costume inherently involves a power transmission between the performer and the audience (Tonkin 1979). The notions of power in masking are often found in indigenous culture. The mask carrier is said to assume power endowed by an ancestor in the mask. That is, the mask signifies the wearer as human carrier of the spirit

of ancestor. The power exerted by the mask is used for social control in the community bound by larger symbolic systems.

The use of mask or costume in many festivals may involve the inversion of conventional social order. Crocker (1982: 81) noted that: "The concealment of identity seems almost to generate challenges to culture's rules about law, order, and etiquette." He exemplifies several festivals where the use of mask or costume is to threaten the existing social order during the events period. For instance, he shows that the masquerades of Saturnalia display not just sexual license but inversion of the usual social hierarchy. In Brazil's carnival, the slum-dwellers traditionally wear the costumes of the eighteenth-century Portuguese court, while the elite appear in such antiestablishment roles as pirates, bandits, Indians, and prostitutes. That is, the mask or costume is often used during the festival for the role reversal through which wearers undergo liberating experience. In mid-century Europe, it is noted that a carnival which involves disguised identity used to attack the established order, at first through jest and the mocking of pompous bourgeois officials, but then by open rebellion (Burke 1978).

In relation to ritual experience, it is argued that masks often help the wearer to enter into a liminal state. However, as Leach (1961: 135) suggests, they are not conditions of the liminal state but modes of entrance and exit into the liminal state. That is, with transformed identity, the wearer can be stripped off his/her attributes of social structural roles and statuses temporarily. Turner (1969) also points out the function of mask or costume in role-reversal liminal phase such as Halloween. For him, masking gives the wearer anonymity for the expression of aggression within the context of Halloween. Taken from Freud's inference, he argues that masking represents the wearer's subliminal fear of what the mask portrays. To draw off power from a strong being is to weaken that being. By wearing the mask that portrays the object of fearness, the wearer can overcome the strong being (object of fear).

Through this brief review, it can be inferred that costume or mask during the festival is related to transforming socially established identity into new identity. The new identity is likely to set a new boundary for physical behaviors as well as verbal

actions. The issue may be related to the liminality experience during the festival since existing norms may not be applicable to the wearer of the mask.

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, the theoretical discussion presented in this section has not been utilized as definitive concepts which are believed to provide a clear definition of attributes for the phenomenon under study. Rather it has been used as sensitizing concepts—less specific suggestive ideas about what might be potentially fruitful to examine and consider (Blumer 1954). That is, theories discussed in this chapter were used as meaningful vocabulary to alert the researcher to the social phenomena happening around him/her and provide general directions along which to look.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research paradigm and methods that underlie this study. The following section situates the social constructivist research approach that framed my data gathering and interpretation. The rest of the chapter provides a summary of research methods used in this study. The description of research methods utilized in this study is organized in the following order: 1) The description of the field research site with the rationale to select the site; 2) A description of the pilot study which was conducted a year before the main study; 3) A description of research design and data collection methods focusing on the evolutionary nature of qualitative research methods; 4) A description of the data analysis procedure based on Glaser's (1978) grounded theory; 5) A description of criteria that were used to ensure the trustworthiness of research findings, along with some important ethical considerations.

### **Research Paradigm**

#### **Constructivism paradigm**

All approaches to social science are guided by interrelated sets of assumptions an investigator has of the world (Burrell and Morgan 1979). This set of assumptions is referred to as a paradigm that encompasses three elements: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Epistemology is about the relationship between the inquirer and the known. Thus, it asks "how do we know the world?" Ontology is related to the form and nature of reality. What is out there in the world that can be known about it? Methodology, on the other hand, focuses on how we gain the knowledge about the world. These three elements combined as a worldview guide the investigator regarding the choices of method and the extent of knowledge claiming in fundamental ways. Thus, it is essential for an inquirer to identify a paradigm on which his/her research is based. Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 218) comment: "Paradigm issues are crucial; no inquirer ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach." Given the



importance of paradigmatic issue in social science research, it is appropriate to lay out basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms in social science. The distinctions made in the Table 1 may be largely arbitrary. However, it is valuable to the extent that this specification offers an informative glimpse on different sets of worldview that guide social science research.

This study examines the phenomenon of tourism perception and participation from a micro-level, and also explores its relationship to macro-level (social world) from a meaning based perspective. It is situated within a constructivism paradigm as described by Denzin and Lincoln (1998), and shown in Table 1. From an ontological perspective, this paradigm advocates that there exist multiple social realities that are locally and inter-subjectively constructed. In terms of epistemology, it suggests that the realities and the inquirer are not independent from each other, but interconnected. From the methodological perspective, the attainment of scientific knowledge (e.g., understanding social order) is viewed as a dialectic and hermeneutical process between the social world and the inquirer. Berger and Luckman (1966: 52) comment:

Social order is not part of the “nature of things,” and it cannot be derived from the “laws of nature.” Social order exists only as a product of human activity. No other ontological status may be ascribed to it without hopelessly obfuscating its empirical manifestations. Both in its genesis (social order is the result of past human activity) and its existence in any instant of time (social order exists only and insofar as human activity continues to produce it) it is a human product.

As shown in their contention, the reality of the social world is a product of constant interaction between individuals and their social world, not an objective entity that waits to be discovered. The aim of constructivism, thus, is not to find any definitive causal relationships (if there is any) but to extract a consensual construction of the phenomenon under study that is more informed and refined than that of any predecessor.

The increasingly dynamic context of travel and tourism calls for new ways of interpreting and expressing the multi-vocality, textuality and situatedness of participants in a qualitative research inquiry (Jamal and Hollinshead 2002). The dynamic context of

**Table 1. Paradigm Positions on Selected Issues in Social Science Research**

| ITEM                         | Positivism  | Postpositivism  | Critical Theory   | Constructivism   |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Ontology                     | Naïve realism<br>(objective external reality)   | Critical realism  | Historical realism—virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time | <b>Relativism—local and specific constructed realities</b>                   |
| Epistemology                 | Dualist/objectivist; findings true  | Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true                                    | Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings   | <b>Transactional/subjectivist; created findings</b>                          |
| Methodology                  | Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods                     | Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods | Dialogic/dialectical  | <b>Hermeneutical/dialectical</b>   |
| Inquiry aim                  | Explanation: prediction and control   |   | Critique and transformation; restitution and emancipation   | <b>Understanding; reconstruction</b>   |
| Nature of knowledge          | Verified hypotheses established as facts or laws  | Nonfalsified hypotheses that are probable facts or laws   | Structural/historical insights  | <b>Individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus</b>                |
| Knowledge accumulation       | Accretion—“building blocks” adding to “edifice of knowledge”; generalizations and cause-effect linkages |   | Historical revisionism; generalization by similarity  | <b>More informed and sophisticated reconstructions; vicarious experience</b> |
| Goodness or quality criteria | Conventional benchmarks of “rigor”: internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity        |   | Historical situatedness; erosion of ignorance and misapprehension; action stimulus  | <b>Trustworthiness and authenticity</b>                                      |
| Values                       | Excluded—influence denied   |   | <b>Included—formative</b>   |  |

Source: Denzin and Lincoln (2000)

tourism can be meaningfully understood and interpreted through the inquirer's active participation in a local context (micro-level). Accordingly, this study aims to represent festival participants' expressed meanings and experiences through my (as a researcher of this study) own interpretation, experience, values, and relationships with the lived world of these participants.

### **Assumptions of the study**

Because the research paradigm orienting this study is based on constructivism, it is shaped by the assumptions associated with this paradigm. The assumptions of constructivism paradigm differ substantially from those of the post-positivistic paradigm which is frequently employed in tourism research.

*Ontological assumption.* The social reality of the festival-goers' experience is subjectively defined by themselves through the use of language. Therefore, there exists multiple realities regarding motivations and experiences of multiple participants in the Texas Renaissance Festival.

*Epistemological assumption.* The subjective reality constructed by the festival-goers can be identified through the interaction between the researcher and the festival-goers. That is, the reality expressed by the festival-goers is reconstructed through the eye of the researcher.

*Methodological assumption.* It acknowledges that the reality is the outcome of language and inter-subjective meaning construction, it is assumed that interviews and field notes, as a language construction of the situated reality, provide the researcher a means to access to this subjective reality. The grounded theory method, then, enables a picture of festival participation to emerge as a result of the researcher's interactions with participants within the festival space.

*Reflexivity.* The researcher's own actions and decisions during the study inevitably affect the meaning and context of the experience under investigation. Therefore, the study findings are not facts *per se*, but are constructed outcomes via the interaction

between the participant, the data, the researcher, and the evaluator or reader of this research.

## **Study Methods**

### **Study site and visitor origins**

The focus and location for the research was the Texas Renaissance Festival located in Plantersville, Texas. Plantersville is 45 minutes northwest of Houston, TX. The Texas Renaissance festival is a commercial theme park, which aims to replicate the selected features of a 16<sup>th</sup> century English village, such as castles, knights, magicians, and jousts. Originally, the festival was founded by a local entrepreneur. Although the festival started with only three stages on 15 acres, it now expanded to a size of 54 acres. The festival takes place annually on Saturdays and Sundays from the first week of October through the second week of November for a total of seven weekends. Although the festival attracted only 33,000 patrons the first year, it continues to grow and claims that it is the largest renaissance themed-park in the U.S. There are currently 158 renaissance or medieval themed festivals in the U.S. Statistics show that over the last 5 years, excluding the year of 2000 and 2002 due to bad weather conditions, the festival attracted over 300,000 patrons on average, being the nineteenth major Houston-area paid attraction base on assess much of the number of paid admissions (Houston Business Journal 2003-houston.bizjournals.com). A visitor exit survey, which was conducted during the entire festival period from October 4<sup>th</sup> to November 16<sup>th</sup> in 2003 by the marketing team of the festival, helped identify the festival as a regional tourism attraction. The exit survey resulted in obtaining 2293 usable questionnaires at the end of the festival. Among other information discovered through the survey, only the information regarding visitor originated areas (city, region, and state) was displayed here. As shown in Table 2, the survey results indicate that more than half (57.52%) of visitors come from the Houston area. It shows that Houston is the major market for the festival as it is located within about an hour driving distance. The next most visitor-generating place was found to be Austin (9.03%). The rank order set

**Table 2. Residence of Visitors (2003 visitor exit survey)**

| <b>Rank</b>  | <b>Residence Area</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1            | Houston               | 1319          | 57.52%            |
| 2            | Austin                | 207           | 9.03%             |
| 3            | Bryan                 | 134           | 5.84%             |
| 4            | San Antonio           | 134           | 5.84%             |
| 5            | Out of State          | 102           | 4.45%             |
| 6            | Beaumont              | 89            | 3.88%             |
| 7            | DFW                   | 73            | 3.18%             |
| 8            | Louisiana             | 72            | 3.14%             |
| 9            | East Texas            | 59            | 2.57%             |
| 10           | Waco                  | 41            | 1.79%             |
| 11           | Corpus Christi        | 33            | 1.44%             |
| 12           | Victoria              | 21            | 0.92%             |
| 13           | West Texas            | 9             | 0.39%             |
| <b>TOTAL</b> |                       | <b>2293</b>   | <b>100%</b>       |

by the visitor number indicates that geographical proximity is the most significant factor that determines the attendance. It was also found that visitors from Louisiana State constitute 3.14%. Given that Louisiana is the one of the most adjacent states to the festival, it is not surprising that they constitute a meaningful portion of the total visitors. In addition, it was found that 76% of the visitors interviewed for the exit survey were repeat visitors, indicating that this annual tourism event relies heavily on the repeat customers.

Although the detailed features vary in its degree of relevance to the renaissance period, basically, all the attractions within the Texas Renaissance Festival are designed to provide a verisimilitude experience of the renaissance or medieval period. Inside the festival, there are over 330 arts and crafts shops which deal with numerous medieval or renaissance period related items such as pottery, sculpted metal, period costumes, and woodcarvings. The façades of all the buildings have been designed to reflect the architectural styles of the renaissance period. There are also 21 open theaters in which 200 entertainment performances take place daily. Most of the performances attempt to usurp the renaissance or medieval motifs in their display. Other attractions include: a

completed Arena reminiscent of the Roman Coliseum where full contact jousting takes place three times a day; two wedding chapels where actual renaissance style weddings are being conducted two or three times a day; four renaissance style gardens; and international cuisine at 60 food and beverage shops. In an attempt to construct the images and atmosphere of the renaissance period for visitors, it has been required that all the employed festival crews, including the entertainers, the shop keepers, and even ticket takers wear period costumes and speak in a way that matches the characters they are trying to portray. Particularly, hundreds of entertainers who dress in period costume are required to walk around the festival site, pose for a picture, and interact with the visitors in the mannerisms of the renaissance period, which tends to offer visitors more lively experiences of the festival. In addition to the inside festival attractions, the festival also offers a free camp adjacent to the festival site for overnight visitors. For many repeat visitors, the campsite is considered to be of great importance to their festival experience as it offers them a chance for more intimate interaction with each other, particularly at night through diverse private parties. Many overnight campers are also family oriented. It is easy to find children at the campground particularly during the day time. Most of the children at the campground are kept away from diverse adult oriented events at night.

Another major feature that characterizes this festival is related to the sheer number of visitors who attend the festival with diverse types of costumes. Unlike the professionals who work for the festival, they are not required to follow a certain dress code (period specific costume). Thus, the type of garb they wear ranges from the historically authentic one to the one based on fantasy novels or movies. In many cases, they have their own characters in accordance with their costume and attempt to interact with the visitors who wear regular clothing. Accordingly, the costumed visitors are considered to be one of the major parts of this festival that helps enhance the level of attractiveness of the festival. For this reason, the costumed visitors with long-term commitments to the festival were selected as a primary research population for this study. Figures 1 and 2 presented below illustrate visitors in various costumes at the festival.



**Figure 1. Visitors in Fantasy Costume**



**Figure 2. Visitors in Crusade Costume**

### **Rationale for the selection of study site**

There are several important factors to be considered when selecting a study site for qualitative research. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999: 69), a realistic site is “where a) entry is possible; b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present; c) the researcher is likely to build a trusting relationship with participants in the study; and d) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.” The above elements were taken into consideration when assessing the Texas Renaissance Festival as a study site. First of all, gaining entry is a necessary condition for successful research. If the researcher cannot gain access to the site and to a range of groups and activities within it, the study cannot succeed. Thus, in regard to gaining entry to the study site, the Texas Renaissance Festival offered an advantage over other Renaissance themed festivals. I, as a primary investigator of this research, had better access to this particular festival compared to other festivals in terms of geographical distance. Additionally, several preparatory visits were made to the festival during its 2002 operating season. Through these pre-study visits, I made an on-going contact with the marketing director of the festival, who later approved the study within the festival site and also offered background information about the festival participants and visitors.

Second, although the qualitative approach (based on constructivism paradigm) adopted in this study does not require a representative sample of the population under study, diverse aspects of the phenomenon need to be incorporated into study. Thus, one of the important criteria for selecting the study site was its ability to enable a rich exploration of a variety of events and people. Although accurate statistical data are not available for comparison, the Texas Renaissance Festival is known as one of the largest and oldest Renaissance themed festivals in North America. It attracts visitors from all over Texas and adjacent states such as Louisiana and Oklahoma. In terms of facility, it provides a large camping ground for visitors, which facilitates the researcher making more intimate observations. Thus, it can be said that the Texas Renaissance Festival offers excellent opportunities to experience diverse variations of people and events. In turn, the diversity



of people and events associated with this festival can help enhance the credibility of study findings by incorporating diverse aspects of the phenomenon into the results.

Third, I made multiple preparatory visits to this specific festival in the year prior to the main research period as part of a pilot study. During the visits, I identified, with the help of festival staff, several key “gatekeepers” to the community of serious participants, and conducted some exploratory interviews with them. On-going contacts with some gatekeepers of the study population has been maintained, which facilitates further development of trust between informants and me as a researcher during the interview and observation phase. Fourth, these relationships also facilitate the maintenance of data integrity and the establishment of credibility, in part because research questions have been explored and refined through these pre-study visits. The nature of these pre-study visits as a pilot study is further explained below.

### **Pilot study**

The pilot study refers to a mini version of a full-scale study which can provide the researcher with experiential logistics from actual procedural implementation. Several advantages are associated with conducting a pilot study: assessing the feasibility of a main study; assessing whether the research protocol is realistic and workable; identifying logistical problems which might occur using proposed methods; collecting preliminary data; developing a research question and research plan. In sum, the pilot study can help facilitate a more systematic approach to actual data collection and analysis. For this reason, a pilot study was conducted at the Texas Renaissance Festival from October 5<sup>th</sup> to November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2002 over seven weekends. Before conducting the pilot study, I contacted the marketing director of the festival in order to obtain the approval for the on-site study. As a result, I joined the marketing team and subsequently helped conduct the visitor exit survey approximately two hours a day (this was not a part of the present study) during the festival period. As a prerequisite to be a part of the marketing team, I was required to wear a period costume. Except for the mandatory costuming, no other restrictions were imposed upon me in relation to my role during the festival. Firstly, the

in-depth interview was conducted with the marketing director in order to gain an overview of the festival and its visitors. The marketing director of the festival played a crucial role in initiating the pilot study since the subsequent contacts were made through his personal guidance to the various festival sites and visitors. During the pilot study, multiple data collection methods were employed: keeping field notes through participant observation and thirteen in-depth interviews with the individuals who were identified as frequent patrons. The observation was made at various points of both the festival and camp site. The main focus of the observations was on various interactions between costumed visitors and casual visitors (people who are in regular clothing). The participants for the in-depth interview were selected using two main criteria: long-term commitment to the festival and dressing in period costume. The contacts for the potential interviewees were made through snowball and purposive sampling techniques: (1) information from the previous interview guides the researcher to the next interviewee; (2) a diverse range of participants were approached, using criteria including age, residence, and gender.

### **My role as a researcher**

In qualitative studies based on constructivism, the researcher is the instrument of the data collection and so, reflexivity, his or her relationship to the object of study is of paramount importance. The researcher enters into the lives of the participants and the nature of his/her relationship with the participants makes a significant impact on the study. Given the importance of researcher's role, Patton (1990) proposes a series of continua for one's role in planning the conduct of qualitative research: 1) *participantness*, 2) *revealedness*, and 3) *intensiveness/ extensiveness*. *Participantness* indicates the degree of actual participation in daily life of study participants. The continuum ranges from being a full participant to being a complete observer. In this study, I was involved with the study participants in several ways although it



**Figure 3. The Researcher (myself) in a Period Costume**

did not warrant my complete acceptance to the community under study. I was dressed in period costume during the seven weekends at the festival site, which was a necessary condition to be accepted to the study participants (Figure 3). I learned, during both pilot study and main study, that costuming was the most fundamental element that separate inside groups (serious visitors) from outside groups (casual visitors). I also learned that other identities such as ethnicity and gender did not play a significant role in determining the nature of interactions particularly within the campground. While I was in costume, I felt more confident in myself approaching other costumed visitors both inside the festival and campground; I also felt I was more accepted when I was in costume than

when I were in regular clothing. I attempted to mingle with the (potential) study participants at various locations (e.g., bar, performing events, and camping grounds) in order to establish more intimate contacts. Importantly, I was staying overnight at the camping grounds every Friday and Saturday night during the entire festival period, which helped me to experience more diverse events alongside the serious participants. The second component, *revealedness*, reflects the extent to which the fact that a study is going on is known to the participants. Revealedness ranges from full disclosure to complete secrecy. In this study, I fully disclosed the purpose of study for all in-depth interviews. However, in other relatively casual contact situations (e.g., casual conversations with festival participants at various locations), I did not provide detailed descriptions of the research purpose to participants, though disclosed that research was being conducted if asked. No one showed any type of hostility or negative reactions to me during the field research. Third, *intensiveness and extensiveness* indicates the amount of time spent in the research setting on a daily basis and the duration of the study over time. The Texas Renaissance Festival lasts for seven weekends. However, because many of the study participants were likely to come to the festival site on Friday night to camp and spend time together, I stayed at the festival from Friday night till Sunday evening each weekend. This full length of stay at the study site helped maximize contact with the study participants and the diverse events that occurred during the festival timeframe.

### **Data collection methods**

Qualitative research often employs multiple methods to collect data. The use of multiple methods helps ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. In this study, both participant observation and in-depth interviewing were used as primary data collection methods, with reflexive journaling providing a supplementary tool for interpreting the data. These methods were incorporated on-site at the Texas Renaissance Festival, each of the seven weekends that the festival was in progress in October and November, 2003.

### Participant observation

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995: 79), observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study. Participant observation involves the inquirer's participation in the social world being studied. A strength of participant observation is the reflexive and direct opportunity to grasp motives, beliefs, unconscious behaviors, and customs of study participants. To assist with observation, field notes documenting relevant events, interactions, and informal conversations were kept. As noted, I was dressed in period costume in order to share in the festival participants' experiences and to ensure easy access to others wearing costumes.

### In-depth interview

The second primary data collection method, in-depth interviewing, is described as "a conversation with a purpose." Patton (1990) categorizes interviews into three general types: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. In this study, the general interview guide approach was used. All the interviews were audio tape recorded with the informed consent from the interviewees for the later transcribing purpose. The interviews which lasted from 30 minutes at minimum to 2 hours at maximum aimed to encourage the informants to verbalize their own constructions of reality. Initially, a set of questions which encompassed several general topics were set to uncover the participants' perspectives and permit the participants to frame and structure the response. The specific interview questions were selected to adequately address the research questions that mainly stemmed from the pilot study. For example, the pilot study identified the serious festival participation and the on-site festival experience as two major domains of interest. The first research question was to explore the extent the festival participation reflected the serious leisure pursuit theorized by Stebbins (1979, 1982, 1992). The specific interview questions, thus, were created in light of the serious

leisure literature and my preliminary experience with the festival (see Appendix 2). Participants were asked about their festival related behaviors and experiences such as: How did you get involved with this type of festival, what makes you keep coming back to this type of festival, do you belong to any kind of social groups within the festival, what kind of efforts do you make to regularly attend this festival, and describe how you became involved with the group. The second research question was to explore the serious festival visitors' on-site festival experience and meanings associated with it. Since the pilot study identified costuming practice and social interactions with other visitors are the most crucial elements that shape their experience during the festival, the interview questions focused on exploring the effects of such elements. Literature on ritual practices (Turner 1969, 1982) and tourism experiences (Lett 1983) were solicited in developing the interview questions in order to reflect diverse aspects of the issues. The questions included: What are you like when you are at work, describe yourself within the festival, what does it feel like to be here in the festival in costume (or garb), and how does the costume affect the way you interact with other people? Since qualitative research is interactive and progressive in nature, appropriate changes were made in the interview questions as the newly identified themes emerged. Some amendments were also made to the wordings of some questions in order to avoid any ambiguity of the questions. Data collected through both participant observation and in-depth interview allowed the thick descriptions for the contexts of the study findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 125) stated: "The description must specify everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings."

### Sampling

Theoretical sampling (purposive sampling) procedure was adopted in this research to select potential interviewees. Regarding the nature of this type of sampling, Patton (1990: 169) states: "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study in depth". Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the

research, thus the term purposeful sampling.” The research population of this study consists of visitors to Texas Renaissance Festival who have a long-term commitment. Given the rather abstract boundary of research population, several criteria were used as a means for selecting interviewees for the study. The selection criteria were derived from the pilot study as it offers a general guideline for the study objectives and research questions. The criteria used to select the interviewees include: 1) individuals who are 21 years or older; 2) individuals who are pure patrons to the festival (in other words, the individuals who work for the festival were excluded from this study); 3) individuals who have made more than 3 visits to the Renaissance themed festivals over the last 5 years; 4) individuals who always wear costumes within the festival setting; 5) individuals who have become part of an on-going social networks from the Renaissance themed festivals. Although these qualities served as a major criterion to identify the study sample, I attempted to maintain a degree of flexibility to apply these standards. The initial contact for an in-depth interview was made through several key persons who were met during previous preparatory visits. Then, the subsequent sampling process conducted as the new themes emerged from examining the collected data as well as from recommendations by other participants. Most of interviews were conducted at the campsite where the potential study participants were in a more relaxed state without having to role-play as they did within the festival site. Such relaxed conditions helped enable both myself (as a researcher) and the interviewees to be engaged in lengthy in-depth discussion.

### Reflexive journal

The third contribution to data collection was through the use of a reflexive journal. A reflexive journal is a kind of diary in which the investigator records information about him- or herself on a regular basis (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Because a qualitative research occurring in a natural setting stresses the intimate relationship between the researcher, what is studied, and situational constraints that shape the inquiry it is important that the researcher make note of and acknowledge interactions that are important to the researcher’s interpretations. The researcher him- or herself is a human

research instrument in qualitative approach. Thus, throughout this study, I kept a reflexive journal in order to help record logistics, insights, and reasons for methodological decisions at the time of inquiry.

### **Participant profiles**

As indicated, formal interviews were conducted with 37 participants during the festival. Socio-demographic characteristics of each individual are displayed in Table 3. The data shows that the interviewees of this study consisted of 13 (35%) females and 24 (65%) males. Data indicates that males are overrepresented in the study sample. Although there is no statistics available regarding the proportion of gender among the visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival, there is a shared impression that there are more male visitors than females particularly within the camping ground. Therefore, this somewhat disproportionate gender representation among the interviewees should not be taken as biased. In terms of age, all the interviewees were above 21 years or older. The age ranges from 21 to 56 years (the average age of 35). The education level shows that approximately 65% of the informants have completed at least high school level education. One noticeable characteristic of highly committed patrons to the Texas Renaissance Festival is related to high representation of Anglo population. Indeed, all the informants of this study were Anglo Americans except for two informants (one Hispanic and one Black). One plausible explanation for this overrepresentation of Anglo population may be related to the theme of the festival. Since the Renaissance broadly encompasses 16-17 century Western European, it may be hard for other ethnic groups to be highly empathized with the Renaissance themed festival. The lack of cultural and historical relevancy to other ethnic groups may have resulted in overrepresentation of Anglo within the festival, and so did among the interviewees. In terms of residential location, it was found that 17 (about 46%) interviewees reside in Houston, Texas. Given the geographical proximity (approximately 45 minutes driving distance) between the Texas Renaissance Festival and Houston, it is not surprising to see that the majority of the interviewees are from Houston area. Additionally, a majority of the interviewees



**Table 3. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Study Participants**

| <b>Informant</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Occupat.</b>                              | <b>Education</b> | <b>Ethnicity</b> | <b>Marital Status</b> | <b>Residential Location</b> |
|------------------|---------------|------------|--|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| I-1              | F             | 42         | House-maker                                  | College          | Anglo            | Married               | Houston, TX                 |
| I-2              | F             | 32         | Sales Manager                                | College          | Anglo            | Divorced              | Houston, TX                 |
| I-3              | F             | 25         | Unemployeed                                  | High School      | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-4              | M             | 44         | Real Estate Investor                         | College          | Anglo            | Married               | Conroe, TX                  |
| I-5              | M             | 25         | Artist                                       | Some College     | Anglo            | Married               | Detroit, MI                 |
| I-6              | M             | 35         | Factory Worker                               | Ninth Grade      | Anglo            | Single                | Dallas, TX                  |
| I-7              | M             | 49         | Truck Driver                                 | College          | Anglo            | Single                | Dallas, TX                  |
| I-8              | F             | 31         | Office Administ.                             | College          | Anglo            | Married               | College Station, TX         |
| I-9              | M             | 30         | Small business owner                         | College          | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-10             | M             | 22         | Technician                                   | Some High School | Anglo            | Single                | Oklahoma City, OK           |
| I-11             | F             | 41         | Office Administ.                             | Some College     | Anglo            | Married               | Houston, TX                 |
| I-12             | M             | 55         | Clerk  | College          | Anglo            | Divorced              | Spring, TX                  |
| I-13             | M             | 28         | Unemployeed/ Carpenter                       | Some College     | Anglo            | Married               | Houston, TX                 |
| I-14             | M             |            | Small business owner / Consulting            | Graduate         | Hispanic         | Married               | San Antonio, TX             |
| I-15             | M             | 50         | Sales Rep.                                   | Some College     | Anglo            | Married               | Dallas, TX                  |
| I-16             | F             | 30         | Unemployeed                                  | High School      | Anglo            | Single                | Dallas, TX                  |
| I-17             | M             | 31         | Manager (Movie Theater)                      | Some College     | Black            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-18             | F             | 35         | Small business owner (Child day care center) | Some College     | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-19             | M             | 34         | Small business owner                         | High School      | Anglo            | Married               | Tomball, TX                 |
| I-20             | F             | 24         | Financial Consultant                         | College          | Anglo            | Single                | College Station, TX         |
| I-21             | M             | 32         | Maintenance of Tank washer                   | Some College     | Anglo            | Married               | Houston, TX                 |
| I-22             | M             | 42         | Safety Director                              | College          | Anglo            | Married               | Houston, TX                 |
| I-23             | M             | 34         | Chef at the local Restaurant                 | Some College     | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-24             | M             | 27         | Computer Technician                          | High School      | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-25             | F             | 42         | Librarian                                    | College          | Anglo            | Married               | Austin, TX                  |
| I-26             | M             | 42         | Manager at the local Restaurant              | High School      | Anglo            | Married               | College Station, TX         |
| I-27             | M             | 38         | Warehouse Manager                            | High School      | Anglo            | Married               | Dallas, TX                  |
| I-28             | M             | 37         | Construction Worker                          | High School      | Anglo            | Married               | Houston, TX                 |
| I-29             | M             | 33         | Merchandise for a store                      | High School      | Anglo            | Divorced              | Houston, TX                 |
| I-30             | M             | 57         | Retired                                      | High School      | Anglo            | Divorced              | Conroe, TX                  |
| I-31             | M             | 39         | Mechanic                                     | High School      | Anglo            | Divorced              | Houston, TX                 |
| I-32             | M             | 56         | Retired                                      | Some college     | Anglo            | Married               | Wichita Falls, TX           |
| I-33             | F             | 21         | Student                                      | College          | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-34             | F             | 21         | Student                                      | College          | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-35             | F             | 26         | Nurse  | College          | Anglo            | Single                | Houston, TX                 |
| I-36             | M             | 31         | Investment consultant                        | College          | Anglo            | Married               | Dallas, TX                  |
| I-37             | F             | 27         | Office Admin.                                | Graduate         | Anglo            | Married               | Houston, TX                 |

were from Texas except for two individuals (one from Michigan and the other from Oklahoma), which indicates that the Texas Renaissance Festival is a regional tourism attraction. This proportion is also consistent with the results from the visitor exit survey. In addition to socio-demographic information, several behavioral characteristics regarding festival participation are also shown in Table 4. The solicited characteristics include: 1) number of years they have attended to the Texas Renaissance Festival; 2) amount of time they spent for Renaissance (or medieval) themed festivals per year; 3) number of Renaissance (or medieval) themed festivals they regularly attended; 4) whether they use festival name; 5) whether they had a membership to social groups derived from the festival; and 6) whether they camped overnight during the festival. The former three questions were to identify participants' level of time commitment to the festival whereas the latter three questions were to identify informants' type of involvement with the festival. As research progressed, the use of festival name, group membership, and spending overnight at the campground were found to be critical elements that separate the serious visitors from the casual (or less serious) visitors. These criteria filtered out 5 transcripts, leaving 32 interview transcripts qualified for the adequate target sample for this study. Thus, only the interviewees who were marked "yes" on all three items were used as a major sources of analysis. However, it should be noted that those (5) that did not meet the sample criteria were also included in the analysis and utilized as complementary cases. This is because the negative cases provide a reference of comparison, which helps clarify the emergent themes and meanings (Glaser 1978). The number of years with the Texas Renaissance Festival (among the 32 qualified) ranges from 4 to 26 years. It was also found that all (32 interviewers) regularly attended more than one Renaissance (or medieval) themed festival. Most of the study participants indicated that they attended 3 or 4 similar festivals that are held in different times. In total, they spent approximately 4 to 20 weekends per year for this type of festival.

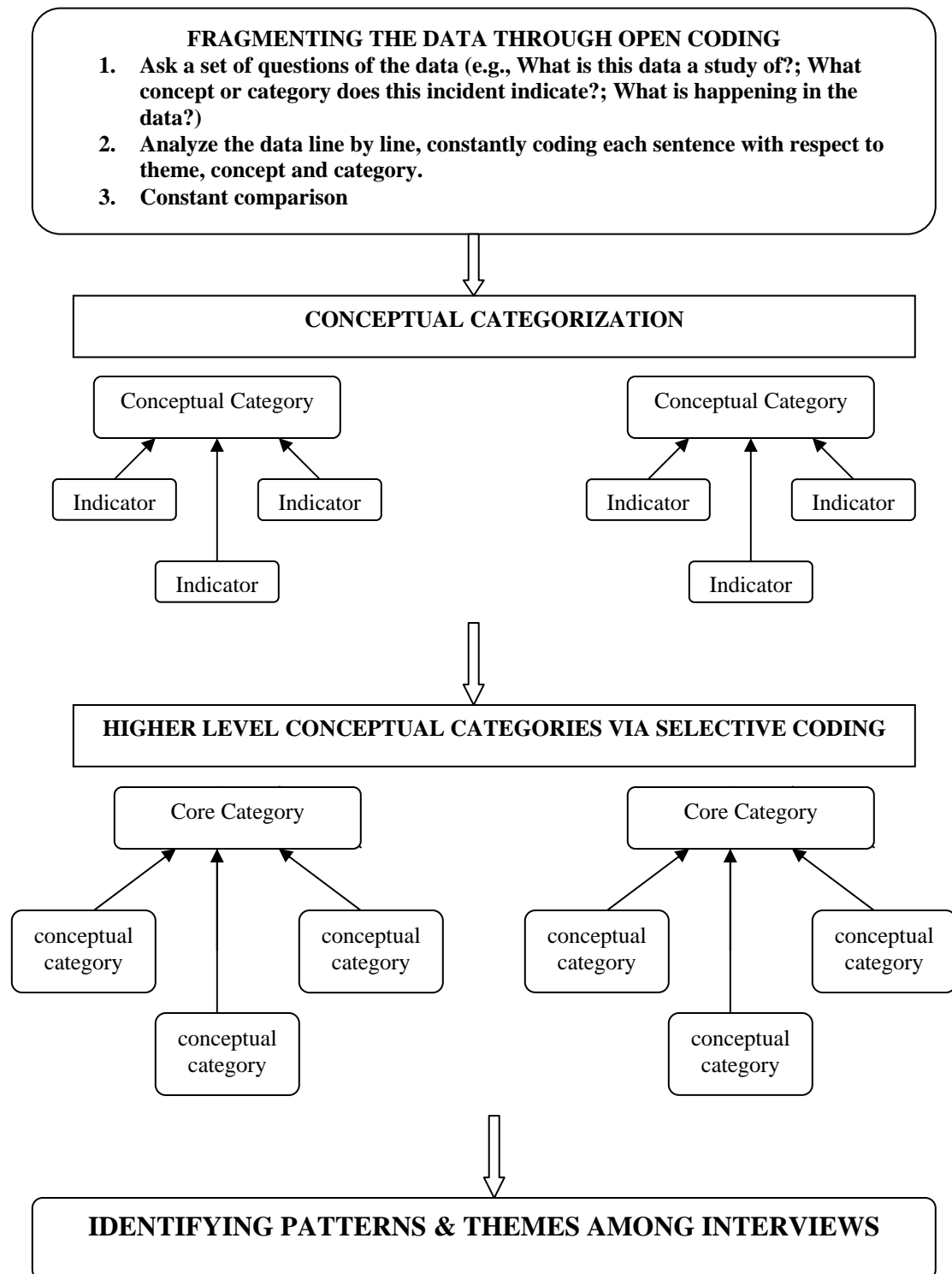
**Table 4. Profile of Study Participants**

| <b>Informant</b> | <b>Use of festival name</b> | <b>Belong to groups within the festival</b> | <b>Camping over night</b> | <b>No. of years with TRF</b> | <b>No. of festivals</b> | <b>Approx. time spending (weekend)</b> |
|------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| I-1              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 7                            | 3                       | 20                                     |
| I-2              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 8                            | 3                       | 6                                      |
| I-3              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 10                           | 3                       | 12                                     |
| I-4              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 8                            | 2                       | 6                                      |
| I-5              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 12                           | 4                       | 20                                     |
| I-6              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 10                           | 3                       | 12                                     |
| I-7              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 17                           | 6                       | 13                                     |
| I-8              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 8                            | 3                       | 6                                      |
| I-9              | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 13                           | 3                       | 10                                     |
| I-10             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 8                            | 5                       | 14                                     |
| I-11             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 6                            | 2                       | 10                                     |
| I-12             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 9                            | 4                       | 14                                     |
| I-13             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 11                           | 4                       | 12                                     |
| I-14             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 12                           | 2                       | 4                                      |
| I-15             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 25                           | 3                       | 12                                     |
| I-16             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 12                           | 2                       | 10                                     |
| I-17             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 22                           | 2                       | 6                                      |
| I-18             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 4                            | 5                       | 18                                     |
| I-19             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 9                            | 4                       | 16                                     |
| I-20             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 8                            | 4                       | 14                                     |
| I-21             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 11                           | 3                       | 12                                     |
| I-22             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 5                            | 4                       | 13                                     |
| I-23             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 12                           | 5                       | 14                                     |
| I-24             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 17                           | 3                       | 9                                      |
| I-25             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 21                           | 2                       | 4                                      |
| I-26             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 17                           | 3                       | 11                                     |
| I-27             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 26                           | 1                       | 2                                      |
| I-28             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 7                            | 3                       | 8                                      |
| I-29             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 14                           | 3                       | 12                                     |
| I-30             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 15                           | 4                       | 13                                     |
| I-31             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 8                            | 4                       | 10                                     |
| I-32             | Yes                         | Yes   | Yes                       | 5                            | 3                       | 7                                      |
| I-33             | No                          | No  | Yes                       | 4                            | 1                       | 4                                      |
| I-34             | Yes                         | No  | Yes                       | 7                            | 1                       | 4                                      |
| I-35             | Yes                         | No  | Yes                       | 5                            | 1                       | 3                                      |
| I-36             | No                          | No  | Yes                       | 8                            | 2                       | 2                                      |
| I-37             | No                          | No  | No                        | 8                            | 1                       | 4                                      |

### **Data analysis procedures**

This study analyzes data from participant observation and interviews following the analytic framework proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978) commonly known as “Grounded theory”. Qualitative data analysis from a grounded theoretical approach involves a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data (Marshall and Rossman 1995). Unlike quantitative research, the analysis of qualitative data within this analytic framework is not a one-time event but an on-going process (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen 1993). The collection and analysis of data occurs simultaneously as themes emerge during the study. The strengths of this analytic framework lie in: 1) Providing strategies that guide the researcher step by step through an analytic process; 2) The self-correcting nature of the data collection process by constant comparative methods; and 3) The methods’ inherent bent toward theory and simultaneous turning away from a contextual description (Charmaz 2000). Despite the strengths of this interpretation framework, it been criticized as being too rigid in that it may undermine the flexible nature of qualitative inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Given this potential disadvantage, I attempted to maintain flexibility in interpreting the results and treat the categories as conditional statements rather than as final statements (Charmaz 2000).

The general goal of the “grounded theory” analysis is “to generate a set of categories and their properties which fit, work and are relevant for integrating into a theory” (Glaser 1978: 56). To achieve this analytic goal, the empirical data are fractured into a set of clusters. This classifying process is often referred to as “coding”. According to Glaser (1978: 55), “the code conceptualizes the underlying pattern of a set of empirical indicators within the data.” Consequently, it provides the researcher an abstract view with scope of the data that are seemingly disparate phenomenon. The empirical data collected through this study were first analyzed through the coding process. Throughout the analysis, *NVivo* which is qualitative analysis software, was used as a tool to facilitate the coding process. The analytic procedures consist of four stages that are not conceptually distinctive but interconnected to each other (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Data Analysis Procedures**

The first stage fragments the data by open coding strategy which allows the texts to be coded in as many ways as possible. The second stage involves grouping the fragmented data by finding a series of categories that connect variously coded sentences, paragraphs, or incidents. The third stage reformulates the data by finding overarching categories (core categories) under which previously coded categories can be subsumed. The final stage searches for patterns and themes that are commonly found in the interviews and field notes by identifying theoretical relationship between all the categories and associated subcategories. The related literature was consulted throughout all the analytic stages in order to enhance theoretical sensitivity in coding and categorization process. The following section discusses the detailed procedure of different levels of analysis adopted in this study.

#### Stage 1: Fragmenting the data

The data analysis begins with open coding, which is coding the data in everyway possible. The results of open coding process become a central building block of generating a set of categories. Glaser (1978) suggested that open coding is a necessary process particularly at the beginning stage of the research because it helps the analyst see the direction in which to take his study by theoretical sampling before he becomes selective and focused on a particular problem. Following this methodological recommendation, the selected 6 transcribed interviews (the selection is based on the my personal but informed judgment as to which interviews are relatively more informative than others) and field notes of the first two weekends were analyzed line by line, constantly coding each sentence or paragraphs as they fit. The open coding strategy during the early stage of research was deemed to be desirable to meet the rather tight research schedule (seven week period).

While perusing the interview transcripts, a series of questions were asked to keep the analyst theoretically sensitive and transcending when analyzing and coding the data (Glaser 1978: 57). The first question is “What is this data a study of?” This type of question helps the researcher to continually and also critically examine the degree of

relevance between the empirical data and the initial research questions. The second type of question occurs when examining field notes. The example question is “What theme, concept or category does this incident indicate?” This question enables the researcher to generate codes that relate to other codes by keeping him/her from getting lost in re-experiencing the data. The last question is “What is happening in the data?”

The initial codes were constantly compared to each other in order to gain further meaning of each code. The constant comparison technique was not limited to the analysis of the interview transcripts. The critical incidents which were documented during the field observation period were also compared to the codes from the interview transcripts. Three types of comparative techniques were adopted for the coding and further analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990):

- 1) The “flip flop” technique involves the comparison between the extreme opposite cases. It aims to illuminate the meaning by clear contrast;
- 2) “Close-In” comparisons involve a search for similarities and differences between codes so that they can be grouped or separated;
- 3) “Far Out” comparisons require placing the phenomenon in situations that are extremely different than normal. The intention is to interpret whether situation changes will affect the phenomenon.

### Stage 2: Conceptual categorization

In stage two, the focus of the analysis moved from fragmenting the data (open coding) to grouping the codes into a conceptual category. As shown in Figure 1, a set of codes was subsumed under conceptual categories when they were found to be contributing to a conceptual category. Strauss (1987: 64) refers to this process as “axial” coding in that “analysis revolves around the conceptual axis of the category. All the codes were compared to each other for possible connections and combinations. That is, conceptually similar codes were combined, which resulted in a series of categories. It is important to mention that the incorporation of related literature was essential in both coding and categorizing process. It is often recommended that the analysis of the

empirical data needs to be carried out in a theoretically sensitive manner (Blumer 1969; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978). The interactive process of constantly comparing the related literature and the empirical data allows the analysis to be more informative by adding expanded scope. The resulting outcomes of such analytic process tend to go beyond local meanings and be incorporated into broader research and theoretical concerns (Glaser 1978). The major theoretical perspectives that were consulted during the analysis process include: Stebbins' (1982; 1992) concept of serious leisure, the concept of alienation (Seeman 1959; 1983; 1991), and Wang's (1999) typology of existential authenticity.

As a result, a series of categories and properties of various categories were identified. The emergent patterns of the data were compared to the results from the pilot study conducted in the previous year, and it helped discover and also confirm the relevant categories and sub-categories. The interview questions were also amended in accordance with the emergent categories from the on-going data analysis.

### Stage 3: Selective coding for core categories

Categorization process at Stage Three was equivalent to Stage Two except at a higher conceptual level. Once initial conceptual categories are identified through combining and separating process, then, those categories are subject to reformulation to a higher level categorization. That is, lower level categories were subsumed under the higher level conceptual categories which were referred to as "core categories". Several criteria of selecting a core category (Glaser 1978: 95) were used in this study.

- 1) It must be central. The category (to be a core category) needs to be related to as many other categories and their properties as possible so that it can account for a large portion of the variation in a pattern of behavior;
- 2) It must occur frequently in the data. The frequent re-occurrence generates a stable pattern and makes it more relevant to other categories;
- 3) It must be connected meaningfully and easily to other categories;



- 4) It must be broad and relevant enough to allow variations within the categories subsumed under the core category.

It should be noted that identifying the core categories is actually an iterative process of working back and forth between interview transcripts and categories. The emergence of a core category influences the way that some incidents and interviews are interpreted. The modified interpretation, in turn, affects the evolvement of a core category and its properties. By this interactive analysis process, there was eventual convergence on a stable and meaningful category set, and associated properties.

Coding process also became more selective and focused around the core variables. According to Glaser (1978: 61), “To selectively code for a core variable, then, means that the analyst delimits his coding to only those variables that relate to the core variable in sufficiently significant ways to be used in a parsimonious theory.” That is, existing code labels were often modified in light of the emergent core categories.

#### Stage 4: Development of patterns and themes

The final stage is a process that compares the core categories (and the lower level conceptual categories subsumed under the core categories) across all the interview transcripts. The purpose is to organize the core categories in a way that generates a compelling story of encompassing the phenomenon described in the interviews.

The above method is illustrated in the following section with respect to some of the key themes and issues that arose from this study.

#### **Mapping data analysis**

Following the data analysis procedures outlined above, themes were identified and developed that helped address each research question. Indeed, the research questions were constantly consulted throughout the data analysis process. When placing the conceptual labels for the codes, the lower categories, and the core categories, it was deemed to be important to consult back to research questions. That is, the data were examined with a constant sensitivity to the purpose of the study. Also, a decision to

further explore certain categories was based on their relevancy to the research questions. Accordingly, the conceptual categories that did not show any relevance to the research questions were selected out while the categories that pertained to the research questions were retained. In general, these were few, and most of the data analysis yielded useful information overall.

**Research Question 1: To what extent do festival goers' participation reflect the characteristics of serious leisure participation as described by Stebbins (1992; 2001)?**

In the process of searching for overarching theme within the data based on theoretical sensitivity (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978), it was suggested that existing concept of serious leisure provide an effective framework to guide the analysis for its close relevancy to emerged categories from the data. Hence, some of the data were recoded (only if they provide better explanatory terms) and re-categorized following the six characteristics of serious leisure specified by Stebbins (1992). The patterns of the data that resulted from the coding schemes indeed corroborated the contention that continuous involvement with the Texas Renaissance Festival is a form of serious leisure. The specific analysis process followed the procedures specified in the previous section. Figure 5 shows a set of codes, categories, and sub-categories that emerged from the data in relation to the first research question.

At the first stage, interview transcripts and field notes were fragmented into component parts through an open coding process. This fragmenting process resulted in 30 conceptual codes. Labeling the codes was an iterative process where the original labels were subject to consistent revision depending on the association with other emerging codes and existing literature. Particularly, serious leisure literature (Stebbins 1982; 1992; 2001) was frequently consulted for labeling the codes and categories.

The second stage involves grouping the codes into more abstracted category than the original codes. For instance, four conceptual codes (Being a playtron, Shared responsibility for the festival, Defining casual visitors as mundane, and A sense of superiority) were subsumed under the category of Identification. Then, at the third stage,



**Figure 5. Mapping Data Analysis (Serious Leisure)**

some categories were merged into higher level categories when it was deemed to be appropriate. For instance, 11 conceptual codes were grouped into several categories such as Social Grouping, Rituals, Values, and Norms. Then, those categories were subsumed under the overarching category “Unique Ethos”. The other codes also followed a similar abstracting process, which resulted in six core categories: Identification, Long-term career, Unique ethos, Significant personal effort, Perseverance, and Durable personal benefits. Each core category was further interpreted in comparison to the related literature.

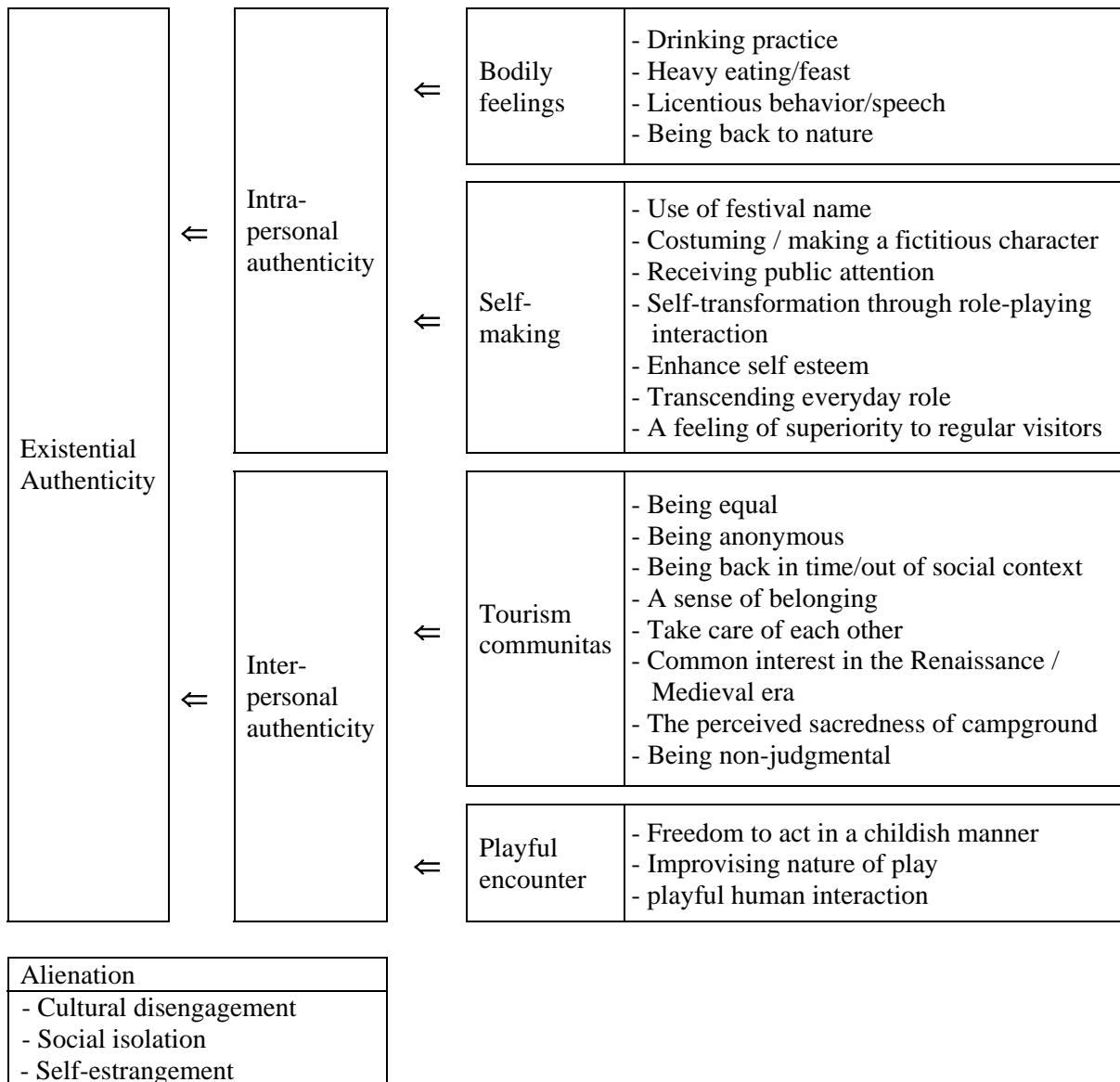
**Research Question 2: What meanings are associated with their experiences during the festival?**

2-1. In what rituals and practices do festival goers participate, and how does this participation affect on-site experience at the Renaissance festival?

2-2. How do the costume and other symbolic materials visitors wear affect their experience at the Renaissance festival?

2-3. How, and in what ways does long-term commitment to the Renaissance festivals affect participants’ identity?

In regard to the second research question and sub-questions, the analysis was focused on their own account of the experiences during the festival and was not constrained to the theoretical categories. As displayed in Figure 6, the analysis procedure was similar to that of the first research question, with the exception of theoretical constraint. First, the raw data related to their experience were broken down into conceptual pieces. Coding is an iterative work which involves constant refining process. The original labels used for the conceptual pieces (codes) were modified to a great extent as the analysis progressed. The identified conceptual codes were, then, compared to each other for similarities and differences. As a result, the conceptually similar codes were subsumed under a more abstract category. To increase the theoretical sensitivity, the codes and emerging categories were read and re-read in comparison to existing literature. Close analysis of the emerging codes and categories suggested that their experiences during the festival seemed to bear a close relevance to tourism existential authenticity addressed by Wang



**Figure 6. Mapping Data Analysis (Existential Authenticity)**

(1999). Then, an interactive process of working between data and theory commenced. Thus, the authentic experience typology specified by Wang (1999) was used as a reference point for labeling and higher conceptual categorizations. For instance, some of the manifested experiences such as excessive drinking/eating practice, rather unmediated sexual behaviors/remarks, and immersed feeling into the nature seemed to be associated with the true bodily feelings to a great extent. Thus, those four conceptual pieces were subsumed under the label of bodily feelings. On the other hand, there also emerged a variety of self-related conceptual pieces. These concepts were grouped under the label of self-making. The labels used in both cases were identical to those used by Wang (1999). The two conceptual categories were subsumed under a higher category of intra-personal authenticity, which eventually contributes to the theme of existential authenticity. The category of inter-personal authenticity also emerged through the same process described above. Here, Turner's notion of *communitas* was found to be particularly helpful to capture the meanings of this broad conceptual category (interpersonal authenticity).

In addition, the concept of alienation has emerged in relation to the theme of existential authenticity. Although the concept of alienation was not necessarily a part of their on-site experience during the festival, it seemed to provide a significant theoretical linkage to the experience of authenticity. Much literature has suggested that a feeling of alienation in their everyday life may act as a driving force to attain authentic (true) experiences through non-ordinary events such as tourism activities. Several dimensions of alienating experience were identified and coded along Seeman's (1991) alienation typology which is based on psychological experience. Three types of alienating experience from everyday life were manifested in the transcripts. These include: cultural disengagement, social isolation, and self-estrangement. Consequently, the theoretical linkage between the concept of alienation and existential authenticity was explored through a close back-and-forth process of moving between data, analysis, and constantly deepening review of the literature.

## **Trustworthiness**

While the data and its interpretations are necessarily subjective, important procedures were incorporated to continually assess the extent to which the researcher's interpretations and constructions are grounded in the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the idea of "trustworthiness" which is analogous to the language of validity in positivistic research. According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993: 132), "trustworthiness is established in a naturalistic inquiry by the use of techniques that provide truth value through *credibility*, applicability through *transferability*, consistency through *dependability*, and neutrality through *confirmability*". *Credibility* indicates how accurately subjects and experiences are portrayed in a qualitative study. *Dependability* refers to how well mapped the study is so that other researchers following the same procedures can reach the similar results. *Transferability* reflects the ability to apply the study to different population, settings or contexts. *Confirmability* refers to how objective the interpretation of study results is; if other researchers examining the same data can lead to similar conclusions (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Trustworthiness of this study, therefore, was established by considering these four aspects of inquiry process.

### Credibility

Credibility in this study was established by incorporating the following procedures: triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing.

*Triangulation*: Helps enhance the credibility of the study results by utilizing multiple sources, perspectives and methods to corroborate results which can strengthen the study's use in other settings. In this study, multiple data sources such as field notes through participant observation, formal and informal interviews, visitor exit survey, and reflexive journal writing were constantly compared for consistency in identified themes. It should be noticed that triangulation is not a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Acknowledging that no observation or interpretation is perfectly repeatable and objective reality can never be captured,

triangulation serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen.

*Member checks:* Help to support credibility by allowing members of stakeholding groups to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions. In this study, the researcher contacted the interviewees as the analysis process moved on to clarify meanings and verify interpretations of data gathered. Specifically, the interview transcripts were sent to each of the interviewees to examine if their responses are appropriately reflected in the transcribed interviews. In many cases, I was able to discuss what has been written in the field notes with the participants of the study in order to clarify the meanings of the incidents and validate the interpretations.

*Peer debriefing:* Helps build credibility by allowing a peer who has some general understanding of the study to analyze data and listen to the researcher's ideas and concerns. This provides an external check and allows peers to play a "devils advocate" role. In this study, the researcher's board of graduate committee members assumed the debriefing roles throughout the study. Particularly, the dissertation advisor was consulted about the meanings of interview transcripts and field notes on a regular basis during the data analysis phase. Such consulting process with the peer enabled the me to stay critical about taken-for-granted incidents emerged from the interviews and observations and also to assess the meanings of the data in many possible ways.

### Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the study results are meaningful and transferable to other similar settings and situations. A sufficient level of *thick description* contributes to transferability of interpretations by describing in considerable detail the data base from which transferability evaluations can be made by other researchers. That is, vicarious feelings through a detailed description of the contexts will allow other potential researchers to judge if it can be reasonably applied to similar settings.



### Dependability

It refers to the extent to which the study results are replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same (or a similar) context. That is, it is analogous to the term “reliability” in a positivistic study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the researchers maintain an audit trail that describes both the process and the product of the investigation in order to ensure dependability of the study results. In this study, the inquiry process and the analysis procedures are recorded and shown in detail to allow the future researchers to check on dependability.

### Confirmability

It is to evaluate the extent to which the study findings are “the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher” (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 290). The same audit trail, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), also enables an external reviewer to make judgments about the product of the study. The study procedures as well as an interpretation process described in detail provide a ground to judge that the study results are based on the account of festival visitors, not on a researcher’s own biased imagination.

### **Ethical considerations**

Studies occurring in a natural setting inherently involve an intrusion into settings as people adjust to the researcher’s presence, which calls for attention to several ethical issues. First, the most common but important ethical considerations include informed consent and participants’ anonymity. In this study, participation in the in-depth interviews was on voluntary basis and participants were informed about the purpose of the study before they had consented to the interviews. They were told that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Pseudonyms were used in the transcripts, analysis and research write to protect the anonymity of participants unless they request to use their real names. Second, since the study was conducted both within the festival site and

camping ground where people are trying to have some leisure time, I attempted to collect the data in such a way as to disturb the setting as little as possible. Third, it is important that the ethnographic researcher sustains his or her judgment on participants' culture in reference to his/her personal cultural context. That is, the researcher should guard against his or her ethnocentrism and attempt to understand the studied value system (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Fourth, the interview participants had the opportunity to read transcripts of each interview in which they share their reactions and were asked to modify the transcripts in order to ensure participants' experiences and feelings were reflected as accurately as possible. Final interpretations of the study results were offered to be sent to participants on request. Fifth, the raw data collected for this study will be kept confidential and stored in a room which is accessible only to a principal investigator of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### EMERGENT THEMES AND CONCEPTS

This chapter presents the results regarding the study subjects explored through participant observations made over two years, informal conversations, and 37 formal interviews. The chapter is divided into four sections to represent the three main areas under which the emerging core conceptual categories were eventually grouped. The first section describes the characteristics of their involvement with the Texas Renaissance Festival in light of Stebbins' (1982, 1992) theory of serious leisure. The second section describes their perceived alienation from the society. Seeman's (1959, 1983, 1991) typology of alienation was incorporated into the results for its strong empirical relevance to the data collected for the present study. The third section deals with the phenomenological experiences of the visitors during the festival. Wang's (1999) typology of tourism existential authenticity was utilized to analyze the results because of its close relevance to the emerged themes. The last section provides a brief summary of the study results.

#### **Festival Participation as a Form of Serious Leisure**

There are roughly about 300,000 paid visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival every year for the seven weekend period. Among the large number of visitors, there exist a rather visibly distinctive segment of people who attend this festival with a long-term commitment. This segment of visitors is of primary focus to the present study. There are several characteristics that help identify them as a distinctive group.

#### **Basic characteristics**

The first three aspects described below (costuming, time commitment, and overnight stay) briefly summarize three important dimensions of serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival. This is followed by a set of emergent concepts and categories.

### Costuming

It was noted that costuming is the most fundamental element that helps identify this segment of visitors in the Texas Renaissance Festival. Despite the fact that costuming is not required for all visitors, these participants devote considerable efforts to costuming and it often becomes a distinguishing feature between the hard-core visitors and the casual visitors who are likely to come in just regular clothing. Bethany, one of the study participants, pointed out, “If someone else is in garb usually know that I have been out here for a while. If you have been out here for a while, they have been friends of yours. It is very easy to just go up and talk to them. You are in costume. I am in costume. Other people aren’t. Let’s talk! Pretty much that kind of mind-set”. Costuming was a critical element of this group of festival goers, for it enabled them to enact ritualistic behaviors on the fairground (see Sub-culture section below), engage in identity alteration (see Identity section below), and also continue ritualistic behaviors at home, in their everyday world. Here, they engaged in practices such as mending costumes (garbs), meeting fellow fair-goers at specific events in town, etc.

### Time commitment

In addition to costuming practices, the intensive time commitment to the festival also characterizes this segment of visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival. The interviewees of this study collectively indicated that they have made a sizable investment of time to the festival. It was noted that they typically spend 4 to 18 weekends attending the festival per year, depending on their financial situation, work schedule, family situation, and the level of personal involvement with the festival. Most of them indicated that they usually spend more than three weekends every year in the Texas Renaissance Festival if there is no emergent family or work situation. It was also found that they regularly attend other Renaissance or Medieval themed festivals. For example, 34 out of 37 interviewees indicated that they participate in more than one Renaissance or Medieval themed festival. As for the interviewees, the most frequented festivals other than the Texas Renaissance Festival include *Scarborough Fair* in Dallas

area and *Excalibur Fantasy Festival* in Austin area. Occasionally, they even travel to the festivals held in other states.

### Overnight stay

They tend to stay overnight at the campground. As the festival closes at night, a considerable number (roughly about a thousand people) of visitors retreat to the campground while a majority of the festival visitors go back home. Staying at the campground provides them a chance to socialize with other festival attendees highly committed to the festival in a more intimate manner. Many indicated that the campground is not just a place to stay temporarily but a forum for people of similar involvement with the festival to associate with each other. Thus, staying at the campground at night also is a critical component to identify the visitors committed to the Texas Renaissance Festival. Figures 7 and 8 present some images of the campground.

The three behavioral characteristics (costuming, time commitment, and staying overnight at the campground) combined together have served as an initial criterion to distinguish serious visitors (people who are highly involved with the festival) from casual visitors. The casual visitors, as opposed to serious visitors, are the individuals who are characterized by the minimal time involvement with the festival (e.g., attend the festival only once or twice a year irregularly), wearing regular clothing (e.g., do not follow costuming practice), and day-trip to the festival (e.g., do not stay overnight at the campground).

While the three behavioral features served as a fundamental criterion to initially identify the serious visitors to be interviewed for this study, there emerged other detailed qualities that contribute to understanding them as a serious visitor through this study. The detailed qualities that characterize their involvement with the festival seem to coincide with the concept of serious leisure which is defined as “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge” (Stebbins 1992:3). Although Stebbins (2001)



Figure 7. A Tent in a Form of Castle at the Campground



Figure 8. A Fire Breathing Performance at the Campground

presumed that participation in theme parks could be considered as a form of casual leisure, patterns emerged from the data in this study appeared to suggest that this commercially intensive form of leisure (conventionally regarded as casual leisure) can be taken as the form of serious leisure by the certain segment of visitors. Accordingly, the following section attempts to further delineate the Texas Renaissance Festival participation (limited to hard-core visitors) with respect to the theory of serious leisure.

### **Serious leisure qualities of festival participation**

The grounded theory approach employed in this study involves a constant comparison between the data and the existing theory. The emergent concepts and categories from the collected data were renamed or sometimes re-categorized in light of the theory of serious leisure. The resulting categories through this constant comparison process coincide with the unique qualities that determine the form of serious leisure to a great extent. Hence, the results are presented along with the six characteristics of serious leisure as identified by Stebbins (1982; 1992; 2001). These are: 1) identification; 2) long-term career; 3) unique ethos; 4) significant personal effort; 5) perseverance; 6) eight durable benefits.

#### Identification

According to Stebbins (1982; 1992), serious leisure participants tend to identify strongly with the chosen activity. As the chosen leisure pursuit is often considered as a central life interest, the participants tend to construct their identities around the activity. Most of the hard-core visitors interviewed in this study also create a large portion of their identities around the festival participation. Within this study, it appears that there are two levels of identification for the serious visitors: sub-culture identification and immediate group identification. The higher level identification is constructed around the hard-core visitors as a whole in contrast to casual visitors. The lower level identification is related to the more immediate social groups evolved from the festival.

*Sub-culture identification:* It was found that they refer to themselves as Ren'ie, Playtron, Die-hard, or Hard-core. Although all these labels are interchangeably used to denote individuals who have made an enduring commitment to the Renaissance themed festivals (as of 2003, there exists about 158 Renaissance or Medieval themed festivals), the terms "Ren'ie" and "Playtron" are the ones most widely accepted among the visitors. Particularly, the term, Ren'ie, was originally used to refer to a person who works for the festival and travels around the different Renaissance festivals year round. Thus, a group of professional performers and vendors who make their living out of diverse Renaissance themed festivals in the U.S. usually identify themselves as Ren'ies. Although the term was originally used to refer to professionals, the meaning has been expanded to include the patrons with a long-term commitment to the festival. That is, the visitors who have made an enduring commitment to this type of festival also refer to themselves as Ren'ies. George explained that "a real Renni is those who are on the road. They *go from fair to fair*. I mean, that's a livelihood. They work as a circuit. That's what we call it. Again, in a sense, we are Ren'ies too because even though we don't get paid for it, we try to enhance the fair experience for the regular patrons. We are kind of entertainers". This type of sentiment about being a Ren'ie was commonly found among most of the hard-core visitors. Dragonhawk also added that:

We try to be a laid back organization, a laid back group of people. There are people out here that are dog-rabbit about it. To them, to be a Ren'ie, you have to talk it constantly twenty four hours a day. You have to be in a specialized costume to be a Ren'ie. You have to work at the Ren fair....but the most of us just consider ourselves Ren'ies because we come out here, we follow the Ren Fairs and have a good time.

On the other hand, the term, "Playtron" tends to be used exclusively among the patrons who are not associated with the festival in any professional way. It is actually an invented word that combines play and patron. It implies that they put on some performance for other casual day visitors although they also attend the festival as a regular patron who pays to come in. George remarked, "We are 'Playtrons'. That is, we are patrons who paid to play. So, we call ourselves 'Playtrons'. We buy the tickets so



that we can go inside and dress up and play. We are adding to the fair because when we go in, there are more garbed people in there. It makes it look like more of a medieval setting. So, we are actually helping the fair and helping ourselves have fun”. No matter what terms they use to refer to themselves, they seem to emphasize their role strongly identified with the festival. Identity theory suggests that the formation or salience of one’s identity depends on the commitment to the role underlying the identity (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995; Stryker 1980). Likewise, this study shows that the identity as a Ren’ie (or other labels) evolves with the level of commitment to the festival.

A *sense of pride* is associated with their role or identity within the festival as they perceive themselves as an entertainer or performer which constitutes a core element of the festival. George suggested that:

One of the things when you are dressed as a ‘Playtron’, you are unofficially representing whatever festival you are at. Like I am at TRF, I am unofficially representing TRF...If I am playing with the patron, I wanted them to have a positive feeling because it is going to affect the fair. So, I become an unofficial representative of the fair.

Similarly, Knight Wing maintained that “We make the fair. Those people who go in there civilian clothes with their children to see that fair, they expect to see us because we are the people who dress up. We are the people who play the part every day in that fair”.

Their leisure identities reflected in all those terms (Ren’ie, Playtron, Die-hard, and Hard-core) are more prominent in contrast to other casual day visitors who are less attached to the festival. Dragonhawk described the festival visitors as a dichotomy of us and them: “it’s us, the Ren fair people against them, mundane people”. The term, “mundane,” has been consistently used among the hard-core visitors to refer to the casual visitors who are not in costume. It is used in a humorous or sometimes derogatory way. John described the mundanes as “toys”. Others describe them as “outsiders looking at the inside world,” “observers” or “spectators”. Wallace also remarked, “They can’t get out of their common day life. They can’t expand their viewpoints of life”. More critically, Dragonhawk described mundane people as “no

heart, no soul, and no imagination”. Such descriptions of “mundane” imply *a sense of superiority* to the casual visitors at least during the festival. Bethany stated, “If you see somebody in garb, you know that they are on another level than people who are in street clothes”. This is because “if they’ve gone through the time to acquire garb, that means they have at least a decent passion for Renaissance” (Raven). Their identity as a Ren’ie relies heavily on costuming as it is the basic quality that distinguishes them from the casual visitors (mundanes). Accordingly, it is extremely rare that they do not wear a costume within the festival ground. However, if they show up in regular clothing in the festival ground, other people will start teasing them as being “naked,” which means that they are out of context.

*Immediate group identification:* In addition to the wider community of Ren’ies, they also tend to identify themselves with their immediate social groups. There exist numerous social groups that are voluntarily formed over time. Because much of intimate interactions occur between the same group members, they often strongly identify themselves with their immediate group. Mark, a head of *Chaos* (one of the largest social groups in the festival), described his experience being a member of the group: “I remember when I was inducted in, that was one of the proudest days of my life. It’s like, I’m in chaos, this is great. The first thing I did was stick a chaos battle star on the back of my pick up so everyone would know I was in chaos”. Such a strong identification with the group offers them a sense of belonging. For the long time festival visitors in this study, much of their identity appeared to be created around being a part of the big festival community and membership in their immediate social groups.

### Long term career

Stebbins (1992) suggested that serious leisure participants have been involved in the activity long enough to find a career path from the chosen leisure pursuit that evolves with various achievements. Along with his contention, the number of years they are involved in the Texas Renaissance Festival helps identify their career as a serious leisure

participant. The data from the interviews indicated that the extent of their career with this specific festival ranges from 3 years to 27 years. Throughout the long-term commitment to the festival, they tend to encounter turning points and different stages of achievement particularly associated with the Medieval themed festival activities. According to Stebbins (1992), serious leisure participants usually go through five career stages: *beginning*, *development*, *establishment*, *maintenance*, and *decline*. The data from this provide an empirical support for the career pattern postulated by Stebbins (1992) to a great extent. That is, the data in this study suggest the existence of career path that evolves along the number of years.

Typically, the initial exposure to this type of festival was through friends, family, or school trips. During this beginning stage, they are likely to come in regular clothing for a day trip like other casual day visitors. Indeed, it can be said that their *career started as a casual visitor*. For some individuals, this initial stage (attending as a casual visitor) lasts for several years. For others, the career as a casual visitor ends in only several weeks. Moving on to the next stage usually involves *a personal contact with the hard-core visitors*. This is typically made through the friends or family who are already deeply involved with the sub-cultural world of the festival. Initially motivated by *the fascination with costuming practice*, they start collecting costumes and accompanying accessories, and also *develop characters* they would like to portray or fit into their personality. During this stage, they tend to try out several costumes and characters in accordance with their own preference and other people's reactions toward the costume and the following character. This process usually takes a couple of years as they stick to one type of costume and character for one period of the festival. The skills related to role-playing with the casual visitors also develop along with the characters they portray. Once they settle down to a desirable character and costume, their initial interest in costuming moves on to the relationship to others. Of course, *it is not to say that they lose their interest in costuming. It is to say that relatively more attention is given to the social interaction among each other*. Dementia, a woman who has been attending the festival for twelve years, responded when asked about the reason for such a long-term

involvement with the festival: “It’s friends. It used to be the swords, you know, costumes, then the jewelry and see what I can buy. Now, it’s just friends”. Because their major interest shifted from costuming to social interactions among the hard-core visitors, they actively seek for the membership to the social groups that exist in the festival. Accordingly, it was found that many of the interviewers of this study hold more than one membership; some belong to more than six groups at the same time. For some, such intensive desire for a membership to multiple social groups may be diminished as they go through the previous stages. Knight Wing, a man who has been coming to this festival over seventeen years, commented that:

I used to be in a group. Like I say, Boners, which was at one time probably membership wise the largest Ren Fair group in the country. I was one of the two founders of that group. Since then, I don’t need that. I don’t need a group. Because everybody in all these other groups knows me and I know them. And I don’t need a group. I am just me. And everybody accepts me for who I am. I don’t have to be in a group.

As implied in his remark, the strongest motivation to belong to a group may be to expand social network at the festival. Given that, many who are involved with the festival and the subculture long enough to be acquainted with other hard-core visitors are less likely to show a strong desire for a membership to various social groups within the festival. However, it should be noted that this does not indicate their lowered involvement with the festival. There is no actual declining stage identified through the interviewers of the study. Many who make a long-term commitment to the festival showed *a dream of creating their own festival*. Indeed, one of the interviewers indicated that he plans to construct the new Renaissance festival of his own. James Hamilton, a man who has been involved with the festival over 18 years, described his plan:

Hopefully next year I’ll start construction on another Renaissance Festival...Well it’s something I’ve wanted to do for about 10 years. A guy came into the Taco Bell where I’m a manager at, when I was working at the one in Huntsville, and his total was \$5.83 and I told him \$583,000, just joking around with him. Well he said if you can give me a 35% return on my investment, I’ll give you the

money. And he gave me a business card, and I called him and said this is something I've wanted to do. Let me give you my business plan and tell me what you think. He called me back and said I've got \$1 million dollars. And he said all we've got to do is come up with the \$1.5 million other that you need. So we're trying investors, and if I don't have any more investors that want to do it by the end of November, then we've got a bank that's willing to put up the rest.

The career path evolves differently according to different individuals of the festival. However, the data showed that for most of them it evolves with different stage of achievements (e.g., costuming, social group membership, and so on). For some, the final stage of this career path may be moving on to profession level as shown in James Hamilton's case.

#### Sub-culture with unique ethos

Stebbins (2001) suggested that serious leisure participants become a part of social world developed around the chosen leisure pursuit. As on-going participants ("regulars" in Strauss (1980)'s classification) to the social world, they tend to develop a strong subculture characterized as a unique ethos with a set of values and norms. Stebbins (1993) argued that the evolvement of the ethos associated with serious leisure pursuits could be attributed to both subculture and social structure as they were interconnected to each other. The features that characterize this mesostructural level of serious leisure pursuits are: a distinctive social world, social networks, characteristic life styles, a number of small groups, and a central collective activity.

*Structure/rituals of the subculture:* The developed social structure among the serious visitors is a direct reflection of the commitment of individuals to the ethos. The subculture of the Texas Renaissance Festival visitors cuts across many social categories (e.g., gender, age, occupation, education level and so on) except for the ethnicity; the whites represent most of the serious visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival. There exist numerous small groups among the serious visitors (Ren'ies). To the best of author's solicited information, there were more than 30 groups varying in size and

structure. The number of group members ranges from 4 the smallest to 200 the largest. Each group is not necessarily exclusive from each other but often allows the members to have a cross membership. Indeed, several study participants have reported that they have more than 3 or 4 memberships at the same time. Hence, many groups are affiliated with each other in terms of membership. It is typical that there are several sub-groups under a main group. For instance, the largest group at the Texas Renaissance Festival is *Chaos* which has more than 200 memberships. The *Chaos* has been known as the most well structured organization among other festival groups. Because most of the group members reside in several metropolitan areas in Texas, there exist three branches in Houston, Dallas, and Austin for social networking between the members during non-festival season. And each branch organizes diverse activities such as monthly meetings, funerals, and weddings within each area. Under the label of *Chaos*, there are several sub-groups such as *Claw* and *Camp Red Star*. The evolvement of such numerous groups may be due to varying degrees of friendship between the in-group members.

The serious visitors practice various rituals particularly at the campground. Although the detailed form of rituals may vary depending on the group, the most typical ritual is an induction ceremony. While accepting new members is the most sacred activity in most social organizations, inducting a new membership within the campground is often perceived as the most sacred time during the festival. Most of the groups of the festival typically have a buffering time before they induct a new member to the group in order to see if the person suits the group. For example, *Chaos* group requires a person to be involved with the group members for a year before they decide to accept the person in the group. They refer to this process as a squire-ship; the term reflects the practice of apprentice to become a knight. A candidate who wants to become a member of *Chaos* needs to have a sponsor who is already a member of *Chaos*. Then, the person is likely to spend more time with that person in and out of the festivals. After one year of such practice period, council members of the group make a decision if they are going to take him/her into the group as an official member. The induction ceremony is typically carried out at the campground at night. The one who gets inducted kneels

down on the ground while the head of Chaos who is in charge of induction ritual puts his sword on his shoulder, reciting a few commandments. After the candidate reciting the commandments, the head of Chaos announces him/her as a new member to the other members usually circled around the ritual site. However, it should be noticed that most of the small groups of the festival that are in the beginning stage do not typically have a structured form of induction ritual. Besides the induction ceremony, there exist some rituals associated with wedding ceremony. One of the distinguishing features of the Texas Renaissance Festival is that they offer Renaissance style wedding opportunities at the church located within the festival. The wedding includes the horse carriage adorned with flowers and ribbons, the chapel, the actual minister who is dressed as the cardinal. One has to pay several thousand dollars to the festival to get married in such a Renaissance style. While such wedding packages are more for the general public who are interested in Renaissance themed wedding, most of the serious visitors tend to have their own wedding ceremony at the campground. Usually, the weddings among them tend to follow a previous engagement process which is referred to as a *handfasting* (a Pagan wedding ceremony). According to one study participant, “Handfasting is a tradition. It’s like a proposal. What happens is you have a minister or some that basically says the ceremony and then they bind the man and woman’s hand together. It’s like a promise. And then you celebrate. It’s like an engagement”. Typically, the handfasting leads to the wedding after a year because the handfasting requires the partners to wait for a year before they proceed to the wedding and actual marriage. The wedding conducted at the camp ground invites a licensed minister who is typically among the group members. The groom and bride wear their favorite costumes for the ceremony. The costume for the groom usually involves fully equipped armors with a sword while the costume for the bride typifies a peasant wedding dress. At the end of the ceremony, they walk under the sword arch created by other group members. The celebration party involves food, drinking, music, and dancing similar to other regular wedding celebrations.

The relationship between the group members outside the festival is usually maintained through Internet communication; a telephone is still perceived as a primary method of communication between the close members. Although it varies depending on the nature of the relationship, most of the study participants reported that e-mail is the most typical way to contact each other. Some groups have their own home-page for the members to share the information regarding upcoming events and to bring out the issues to other group members for the discussion. The relationship between the members during the off-season is not limited to such virtual communication. It was reported that there exists a monthly off-line meeting which is not necessarily exclusive to a certain group. These monthly gatherings are organized in different geographical regions such as Houston and Dallas as many of the Ren'ies reside in those areas. The participants of this study have reported that they typically wear a full costume and carry auxiliary weapons (e.g., sword, ax, hammers) when they attend the meeting as they do within the festival. The meeting is held in a certain local bar (*Crooked Fair* in Houston and *Red Lion* in Dallas) where they are allowed to bring in their weapons. It is a voluntary social gathering that includes a variety of individuals who are deeply involved with the subculture of Ren'ies. Thus, this gathering serves to reinforce the solidarity among the Ren'ies outside the festival.

*Values:* A subculture of visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival comes into existence as people identify with certain objects or activities and, through those objects or activities, identify with other people. The unifying experience patterns are followed by a set of values and norms associated with being a Ren'ie. There is a set of values evident among the Ren'ies (the hard core visitors). The values identified in the present study and described below are not necessarily distinctive from each other but interconnected to some extent.

*Personal freedom.* The most dominant value in the ethos of the Ren'ies is personal freedom. Similar to the subculture of Harley Davidson owners (Schouten and



McAlexander 1995), the identified personal freedom can be divided into two types: liberation (freedom from) and license (freedom to). Liberation indicates a sense of escapism. Most of the interviewers perceive the festival as an outlet to release their anxiety and stress derived from everyday reality. Particularly, costuming practice is the core element that embodies the value of personal freedom. Given that clothing is one of the fundamental elements associated with their various social and self-identity, costuming (disguise of physical appearance) is often conceived of as an antithesis of all the sources (family obligations, job schedule, authority, and social relationships) of confinement that accompany their everyday and work roles. By changing their appearance away from their home and work environment, they tend to gain an extreme level of freedom. It is a realization of fantasy to be somebody else other than him/herself confined in everyday and work roles. Such self-transformation fantasy is shared by all the Ren'ies. The collective fantasy makes each individual feel as if they are in different time period interacting with unworldly people. That is, by collectively participating in such a fantasy world instantly created at the festival, people reinforce the sense of freedom from the present world. Also, excessive consumption of alcohol and food during the festival signifies liberation from the U.S. middle class value that honors the self-control of drink and food for various health and religious reasons.

Another dimension of personal freedom is license. Being in the festival, especially while being in costume and subsequent character, grants license to behave in ways that would be socially awkward or unacceptable outside the festival. As discussed, one important function of costuming is to create for oneself a persona or temporary transformed ego. The alter ego through costuming gives oneself a freedom to act in a way that they would never do with everyday self-identity. Since the nature of alter ego tends to be determined by the type of costume (if one wears King's costume, then he/she has to act accordingly), it can be inferred that a selected costume is a reflection of desired self image. For many Ren'ies the chosen personae borrow heavily from the Celtic barbarian (warrior) stereotype or bar wench, which allows them to act rougher, tougher, freer, and more flirtatious than they normally would. Obviously, such barbarian

and bar wench characters contrast starkly with the image of modern urbane beings. The casual day visitors who are not in costume also implicitly understand that many seemingly deviant behaviors by such characters are a part of entertainment in the festival. This tacit agreement among the visitors creates more freedom to act and speak as they want. One of the interviewers, who is in barbarian warrior character, stated, “I can get away with anything in this outfit, yeah. You just try to talk to people and they take it because very few people get mad at us”. There is another interesting evidence that exemplifies their inclination for freedom through costuming. As described, for the Ren’ies, various social norms, obligations and regulations are considered as confinements and become an object to overcome at least during the festival. Such desire for liberation is well exemplified in their intentional dissociation with various historical reenactment groups. For example, one would anticipate that Ren’ies are somehow connected to SCA (Society of Creative Anachronism) devoted to reenacting Medieval European history with a high level of accuracy, given that both parties are involved with Renaissance and Medieval history. Contrary to the expectation, several interviewers expressed a degree of antipathy toward SCA. It is interesting to find such an antipathy or apathy from them, since most of the Ren’ies show a high level of interest in Renaissance or medieval period as well. One study participant who was once associated with SCA explains his experience:

I’ve been doing the SCA and I had stopped for a while and I found a Ren Fair. They weren’t really connected in many ways other than I had experience. They were real strict about what time period you can make a character...what you have to be. But at Ren Fairs, just as easily as you can be of French Knight. You can be dragon or gargoye. Anything your imagination will allow you can be at Ren Fair. You can’t do that with SCA. That’s why I stopped doing the SCA. That’s why I fell in love with Ren Fairs.

As described in his remark, they do not want to sacrifice their personal imagination or freedom to portray any character in favor historical accuracy. For many, the Texas Renaissance Festival is specifically valued because of the freedom bestowed toward them in terms of the self-expression.

*Hedonism.* Obviously, the festival is considered as a vacation time. Many study participants have reported that much of their vacation time is occupied with the participation in various Renaissance themed festivals. Given the amount of time they devote to this type of festival, it seems natural that this is the only major leisure/tourism activity they are involved with. For them, the festival is the only venue to release the energy accumulated over time. The condensed physical and psychic energy is reflected in their value for extreme hedonism during the festival particularly among the Ren'ies. For many, the ultimate purpose of attending the festival continuously is to attain a pure pleasure derived from interactions with people. Expressions of hedonistic desire abound in most of the interview transcripts. The most common phrase is "This is all about having fun". Dragonhawk, a head of one of the festival groups, concurred on this: "With our clan, we have a motto and that is to have fun". The festival is usually considered as a sanctuary that allows them to have as much fun as they can, which is limited in outside the real world. The search for a pleasure is not just self-centered in direction but usually involves other people (particularly the casual day visitors). Identifying themselves as a "Playtron", they value entertaining other casual visitors whom they call "mundane". The term "mundane" implies that they wander outside the fantasy world (which is a real world for the Ren'ies during the festival) constructed in the festival, hence they do not experience a pure pleasure. Since they perceive the "mundane" as a pitiful being who has not open their eyes for the world of fun and magic, they feel that it is their duty to open up their eyes and entertain them. Of course, this is a symbolic meaning underlying their perception toward the casual visitors who are not in costume. More practically, since they act as if they are performers at the festival, they need spectators in a sense. And much of pleasure is derived from the role playing interactions with the casual visitors. Therefore, they often stress the importance of the casual visitors having fun so that they return the next year.

*Anti-materialism.* There exists a sense of anti-materialism among the Ren'ies.

Materialism generally refers to an orientation emphasizing possessions and money for invisible personal characteristics such as happiness, status, and social competence (Richins and Dawson 1992; Ward and Wackman 1971). Specifically, Richins and Rudmin (1994) identified three elements that commonly characterize materialism or materialists; 1) a high level of material consumption is placed at the center of their lives, thus functions as a goal and serves as a set of plan, 2) possessions and acquisition of material objects are perceived as essential to the satisfaction and well being in life, and 3) the number and quality of possessions accumulated tend to serve as a fundamental reference point to judge one's own and others' success. While such materialistic characters are often referred to as a dominant value that defines Western industrialized society (Cushman 1990; Featherstone 1991; Fromm 1967), it is also true that not all individuals accept the materialism as a centralized personal value. That is, for some individuals and cultural groups, the lifestyle based on materialism may not be accepted as a way of life as shown in a strong anti-materialism associated with 1960-70's hippie movement. Such a streak of anti-materialism was found to be prominent among the hard-core visitors at the Texas Renaissance Festival. A majority of the interviewers of this study explicitly and implicitly displayed the contrasting qualities to the elements linked to materialistic value. The first two qualities of materialism suggest that possession and acquisition of material objects are centralized in one's life that his/her psychological well-being is likely to be determined by them. In this study, many of the interviewers often showed the strong antipathy toward the materialism being placed on a center of modern society. Knight wing stated that "Our society now is a total disgrace to humanity. The planet is being destroyed. And people don't care. They only care about their microwaves, their refrigerators, their digital DVD players. They care less about what really matters. And that's us". Grune's statements also resonate resentment toward the materialism oriented society.

Modern time is more geared toward making a paycheck to earn a living for what you need than spending time with your family and enjoying what you have.

That's what modern time is to me... You have to buy things to be a complete person. In my opinion, that's bull. I don't feel that way. I never truly have. If I could've avoided those aspects of the world, I will take the opportunity. If I can get away from closed minded people and just spend time around people that are willing to keep their eyes and hearts open, I will.

It has been suggested that materialists place less emphasis on interpersonal relationships than do those low in materialism (Fromm 1976; Richins and Dawson 1992). Conversely, it can be said that anti-materialists place more emphasis on authentic human relationship than on material accumulation (e.g., accumulation of wealth). In this sense, the strong value placed on human relationship among the Ren'ies implicitly illustrates their anti-materialism. Gina stated, "To me, what matters is people because in my heart and my husband's heart when we go to heaven we have to face the judgment day. And I don't care what you have. He is gonna wanna know what you did with your life. Did you make people happy? Did you put people before yourself? To us, life is precious. People are precious thing". Hacker (1967) suggested that materialism substitutes for a lost sense of community. For the hard-core visitors to the festival, the sense of community that lacks in modern society seems to be gained through the spontaneous bonding relationships (e.g., sharing, caring, and accepting) between each other not through possession and consumption of things. The last quality of materialism is that the attainment of wealth is used as a yardstick to judge one's success. The interviewers of this study often indicated that the level of material attainment is not used as a basis to evaluate each other. Violet commented, "Most of the people that I met out here look at people for who they are, not what they look like, what they drive, what they have".

Despite the anti-materialistic value they hold, the continuous engagement in the festival does not come naturally or cheaply. First, costume and accompanying accessories are costly. For clothing, they may spend \$500 to \$2000 for an authentic looking Renaissance or Medieval leather armor, \$100 (mass-produced) to \$800 (custom made) for suitable footwear. The price of weapons is also high. A basic (the most common) weapon they carry along while in costume may be a sword. The price range runs from \$50 to \$1200, depending on the quality (authenticity). Women may spend

several hundred or more dollars for an elaborated period dress. Second, the camping equipment and entrance fee cost them a considerable amount of money as they continuously attend the festival (\$21 of entrance fee per day) and camp two or three days each week. Most of the hard-core visitors make some of their outfit, but few make all of it. Particularly, the medieval weapons (e.g., sword, dagger, ax, sickle, and etc) that accompany with their costume and character are hard for them to make. This ironical consumption pattern seems to be resolved as their career with the festival develops. For the first few years, they are likely to be interested in collecting desirable costumes and weapons as such elaborated characters draw more attention from the public in the festival. However, as they attend the festival more and more and become deeply imbued with the subcultural world of the festival, they tend to change their attention from the collection of costuming materials to the establishment of more meaningful human relationships during the festival.

*Norms:* According to Stebbins (1992), a unique ethos developed around the chosen leisure pursuit consists of its subcultural values and norms. Although personal freedom was identified as a core value that underlies the hard-core visitors, there also exists a certain set of norms that transcend or sometimes regulate the value system. During the festival, they celebrate the sense of liberation from existing social norms and regulations in terms of their actions and the way of speaking to other people. However, there exists a normative boundary to such freedom among them. The gist of the norms implicitly understood among them is about not acting against others' will. This is well represented in the frequent response from the interviewers; "No means No here." This illustrates that the extent of freedom is set by a mutual agreement among the participants. Thus, it can be said that the personal freedom sought for during the festival is bounded by such mutual understandings. Occasionally, this tacit rule is broken by novice festival goers often due to their misconception of liberating ambience created at the camp ground. James Hamilton, who has been acting as a patrol-man within the camp ground, explained such incident.

Well, last weekend this guy was trying to feel all over my friend, and she backed up into me, and he says, “What, is this your girlfriend?” Let me tell you something, I’ve been here for 2 years now and this is the way Festival is. I can touch her anytime I want. I said, “No son, this is not how it is”. I’ve been out here for 14 years, this is not how it is. You can leave her alone and leave this drum circle walking, or someone’s gonna carry you. Your choice.? He says, Oh, I’m sorry. But people like that, I have no respect for. They don’t have a brain they want to use.

That is, the bottom line for any seemingly excessive behaviors is to respect other visitors’ opinion. The same line of logic applies to their actions toward the casual visitors within the festival site. While staying within the festival site during the day, they frequently interact with the casual visitors based on role-playing type rules. Because of the nature of role-playing actions, sometimes the way they act toward the casual visitors can be taken as socially inappropriate or even offensive. However, such seemingly radical actions are carried out to the extent they do not interfere or offend others’ experience and feelings. This coincides with hedonistic value they hold especially during the festival. The interactions occurring between the hard-core visitors and the casual visitors are governed by the hedonistic value. Thus, it is widely understood code among the hard-core visitors that any actions that may ruin not only their own experience but also others’ are strictly prohibited particularly when interacting with the casual visitors. George, a man who has attended the festival over the last 20 years, corroborated this by commenting, “The Ren’is. The playtrons being like Regina and I ’re paid to go in. But we dress up. We play with the regular patrons. But not to the extent that we will be interfering with anyone. That’s the main thing. The idea is to do a little bit to enhance other patrons, you know, the mundane patrons’ experience. That just makes us feel good”. As the festival and camp ground are perceived as a magical time and space where they safely preserve their self-hood without getting involved with the present world, a discussion of the mundane issues is likely to be ostracized particularly at the camp ground. Indeed, they refer to various mundane problems as “drama.” John described the meaning of the term: “When somebody says

the word drama, that means drama in a bad way, and that means you're bringing something into the camp that should be best left outside. He continued to explain, "There is no drama in this camp. We don't allow drama in this camp. So, no fighting, no arguing, no bringing outside issues into this camp. You come here. You have a good time. If you wanna have an argument, you can go away. No drama, social issues, and all of them. They are outside stuff. It doesn't come here".

### Perseverance

Previous research collectively suggests that serious leisure participants are willing to persevere through adversities that may follow the chosen leisure pursuit. The hard-core visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival also showed a varying degree of perseverance against diverse difficulties that they occasionally encounter as to attending the festival. The most commonly reported hardship is related to costuming practice. A costuming is the most central element that characterizes their collective identity as Ren'ie; one must wear a costume to be qualified as a Ren'ie. Therefore, their experiences at the festival are both directly and indirectly associated with such a practice. In most cases, costuming is likely to have a positive effect on their experience: self-expression, self-esteem, a means for inter-personal belonging, and so on. However, costuming does not always accompany positive experience for the wearer. Since the theme of the festival is about Renaissance, costuming for the most attendants tends to follow such time period characteristics; occasionally, some attempt to portray characters based on fantasy novels and movies such as *the Lord of Ring* and *Conan the Barbarian*. Some of the characters require heavily equipped costumes for the detailed elaboration. Particularly, most warrior characters use a heavy leather armor and sword, which sometimes leads to extreme physical discomfort for the wearer. Over the festival period, the temperature during the daytime ranges from 80 degrees to almost 100 degrees. Under such a hot and humid weather, wearing a heavy armor costume and carrying a heavy medieval weapon often physically wear them out. Davis, a man who portrays a



warrior character with a black leather armor and a 4-foot length sword, comments his experience with such costuming:

One thing about garb (costume) is “hot”. It is hot. Oh, god! You walk all day in the fair. But thing is we ought to do with King’s rule. It’s heavy. I carry a sword which goes over my shoulder. At the end of the week, I take off. I go to work on Monday. How do I feel? I am sore. My shoulder is killing me from carrying it all weekends. You get used to carrying it. What happens is first hour of carrying it...you don’t notice it. If you take it off and go to bed, then you go, Ouuuu...Why do I do this to myself?

Such physical discomfort following costuming practice is not limited to people portraying warrior or barbarian characteristics. For women portraying a bar wench which is one the most typical characters among the visitors, a tight bodice has to be worn under the blouse. Many reported that they often experience a degree of difficulties with breathing, eating, and even walking while wearing a bodice. Other characters also involve a varying degree of physical discomfort. One of the interviewers, who is a 23 years old woman playing a fairy angel character, also reported:

Basically, when I put the harness on, the harness goes on like round me up in front and underneath my breast and I have two stripes that come over my shoulder that hook on your knees there. And what that does is you have to have it so tight so that wings stay to you. So, you can actually function and move with them without flopping around. But I get terrible chasing from the stress like all the way around me. It also constricts the muscles. So, basically what I am wearing is that I don’t feel it. But when I take ‘em off, that’s when the pain starts. Because then all my muscles wanna move, pretty much simultaneously, and then you feel the burn of the chasing and all that. My other problem that I have been having is shoes which I have pretty much gotten rid of this year because I get so much blisters because I walk on my toes all day. It didn’t matter what kind of shoes I got. They will always give me these horrible blisters. That was like blister on top of blister on top of blister. It gets really painful...Oh, yeah, we put ourselves in a lot of physical agony of here just to look good. But, it’s all worth it.

Besides the physical discomforts involving costuming practice, there are various types of adversities they have to deal with as they regularly attend the festival. One type

of adversity is family conflict regarding festival participation. Since the festival participation involves seemingly deviant activities (costuming and role playing) in regular social contexts as well as a considerable amount of time and money, some encounter the family members disapproving their commitment to the festival. Bethany, a 24 year old woman who still lives with her family, complains that: “people think, that thing is my family in particular, my family hates that I do Renaissance festivals. Oh, they think Ren’ies are a bunch of heathens and devil worshippers. They have never been out. So, they were being prejudiced about something they haven’t seen before. You know, one of them heard story once and told that to my family”. Despite that family objection, she plans to more actively participate in the festival and convince her family by actually inviting them to the festival. In some occasions, one may undergo some embarrassing experience by encountering family members or regular social acquaintances while being in a character. Debi, a 45 year old woman coming to the festival over the last 26 years, describes her rather embarrassing experience within the festival:

I wore a barbarian suit out here about ten years ago. And my step son was here with a group of his friends and their parents. And his mom was in full bikini (screaming). That will do it to you! That will make you a little embarrassing because then my real life interfered with my fantasy and I was like, “holy crap!” They were walking out of the bar. And then kids were going, who’s that dude? Oh, it’s my mom. You know. So, I am a little more careful now.

Despite those adversities (e.g., physical discomforts following costuming practice, family conflicts, social embarrassment), they are likely to perceive costuming and festival, participation not only essential in their life but also very rewarding as it induces various positive feelings about themselves in the process of interacting with others. Raven, a man who wears a black leather armor with 10 pound wings on his shoulder during the festival, stated, “Because the feeling of happiness, the actual feeling of release and joy, and to be out and play with people and joke with them, that overpowers everything. That makes it all worthwhile”. Stebbins (1992) explains such perseverance in terms of exchange perspective: the rewards outweigh the costs.

### Significant personal effort

Stebbins (1992) suggested that serious leisure participants, through long-term commitment, tend to make a significant personal effort to attain special knowledge and skills pertaining to the chosen leisure pursuit. Becoming a Ren'ie inevitably involves long time experience with the festival and the sub-culture created at the festival. The long-term exposure to the festival tends to allow them to develop some skills regarding role-playing performance and costuming. Specifically, as costuming is the core element of being a Ren'ie, a considerable personal effort is given to collecting desirable costumes and accessories that accompany with them. A degree of elaboration on the costume is often equated with the level of career developed through the festival. That is, the more elaborated one's costume is, the more experienced one is with the festival and the subculture. Hence, they generally make a significant and consistent effort to adorn their costumes. As a way to distinguish themselves from other similar characters developed within the festival, they often attempt to create a more unique character that has not already been adopted by other people. Such desire to create one's own unique character in combination with the practical need to save money on costuming often leads them to develop a special skill to make their own costume. Indeed, many of the interviewers indicated that they had to learn how to sew and stitch to make their own costumes. James Hamilton explained:

You have to learn how to sew if you don't know, but I know how to sew. At first I had to practice with some patterns because they didn't really have patterns for what I wanted to make. So I found similar ones and practiced, and started modifying things to get where I was at.

Creating one's own costume is often perceived as a part of the rewarding experience associated with the festival. Lee comments, "That's the main fun of it. It is making your own costume. At least for us. We make a lot of our own stuff". That they make their own costumes can be conceived of as an indicator the extent the Renaissance Festival is infused with their everyday life. Several participants of this

study indicated that as they are more involved with the festival and costuming, they are more likely to look to the materials for making costumes and accessories in their everyday life. Sometimes, they attempt to keep the knowledge and skill of making a costume to themselves because of the significant effort put into making costume. The uniqueness of costume often serves as a source of public attention and admiration, which is reflected in the number of times they pose for a picture during the festival. Due to its significant symbolic meaning, the skills involved with making a unique costume tends to be kept secret. Regina, a 27 years old woman who has made a fairy angel costume for herself, explained:

My biggest hang-up was just trying to find a way to make wings 'cause making wings out here is a big secret. You don't tell anybody how you make wings. I don't tell anybody because nobody told me...Also, your individuality is so important because I don't want to have fifty people suit up with my pair of wings.

The extent of skills and knowledge developed regarding festival participation is not limited to creating a costume. During the festival, they often attempt to interact with the casual visitors based on role-playing in accordance with the characters they portray through their costume. Such interactive performance requires one to be accustomed to the way of speaking and acting that is appropriate for the characters. If they portray some Scottish warrior, they are expected to learn the Scottish accent and act in a way. Although it is not obligatory to learn such a performance skill, they often make a special effort to train themselves in accordance with the character to enhance their entertaining experience. Besides the role-playing performance, there exist a variety of special entertainment performances occurring around the campfire at night. Typically, the campfire starts around 10 or 11 at night in the middle of camp ground. The campfire is regularly staged every Friday and Saturday night during the festival period by a group of volunteers among the hard-core visitors. The campfire usually involves dozens of people who play drums, stage a fire breathing show, and dancers in chain mail. They are all voluntary participants for their own entertainment. Usually surrounded by hundreds of spectators, they stage a variety of voluntary performances. Among others, a fire

breathing performance is carried out on a regular basis by a group of volunteers and often become the center of attention. They typically learn to stage a performance at the camp ground. The related skills are usually transferred between the hard-core visitors who are fascinated with such practices. One of the fire breathing performers explained that acquiring such fire manipulating skill requires him a considerable amount of time and risk taking for practice. He commented:

Since I started doing Ren fairs, I learned how to breath fire and I learned how to spin fire on staves. I created my own fire, manipulation tool. This is a skill that I've made four hundred dollars an hour using. The average fire breather puts up approximately sixteen hundred degrees flame from their mouth. It's incredibly dangerous thing to do. I am very good at what I do. I breathe hotter. I breathe almost twice hot as those people. I've been measured at three thousand two hundred degrees Fahrenheit. Fire shooting out of my mouth between six and twelve inches away. I've also been burned very badly. I was using fuel that I shouldn't have been using. And I hurt myself. The flame came back and collapsed my lungs...put second and third degree burns down in my top half of lungs. I was in an oxygen tank and intensive care work for two weeks and spend another four in the hospital recovering. So, ya, it's expensive.

Although the detailed skills they acquire throughout long-term career with the festival may vary depending on their specific interest, the long time commitment with the festival usually allows one to attain a specific skill associated with costuming and performance. The development of skills does not seem to be an obligatory process but a natural evolvement of intensive interest in the subcultural elements of the Renaissance themed festivals.

#### Durable Personal Benefits

Stebbins (1979) identified eight durable benefits that follow from the serious leisure pursuits. These include self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, sense of belongingness, social interaction, and lasting physical products. For Ren'ies, the most prominent benefits are related to sense of belongingness and social interaction as these are commonly identified by all of the interviewers of this study. They commonly

specified the meaning of the festival participation as “bonding opportunity for people of like-mindedness”. The widely shared values among the hard-core visitors provide them a we-feeling during the festival. George reported that “I am with my friends. We are doing things that we all enjoy doing together”. Others also characterized their experience during the festival as “family reunion.” Although they are not real families, they often described their festival friends as a “family of choice not of blood.” As most of them are occupied with their everyday work schedule and geographically separated from each other, the festival is the only time all of them get together and interact with each other. Also, the extended social network by joining a certain festival group gives them enduring sense of belongingness. Mark, a head of Chaos, pointed out that: “I think for most of the guys and girls in Chaos is they want that family affiliation, they want that familiarly we got with one another, they want to know that they belong to something”.

The most prominent activities with which they are involved during the festival may be costuming and role-playing with the casual visitors. It was found that the continuous engagement in such activities often provides them a various self-benefits. Particularly, costuming practice offers them a chance to express their desired self that often transcends their everyday self primarily associated with work and family roles. Debi, a woman who works as a librarian, described her experience: “Freedom. When you are out here in garb, you don’t have to be assumed. When I am out here in garb, I don’t have to be a librarian. I can be silly. I don’t have to be anybody’s mom”. Amanda concurs on this: “I am becoming much more open person. I feel very free to say what I think and express what I feel. And it’s hard to do that in working environment. And so, I come out here and I feel like I am much more myself”. As the festival is obviously a free time activity that occurs outside their work sphere, it serves to relieve the stress stemming from occupying work roles. That is, the extent of relaxation they are able to attain through the festival provides them a chance to physically and psychologically renew themselves and return to the real world with recharged self. The constant interactions with the casual visitors at the festival also serve to enhance their self-esteem or self-image. They often describe the experience stemming from the

interactions with the casual visitors as “special,” “excited,” “flattered,” and “wonderful ego-boost.” Within the festival site, they become a center of public attention although the amount of attention tends to vary according to the degree of elaboration and uniqueness of their costume. They often pose for pictures hundreds of times a day, and such intensive public recognition helps enhance their self-confidence as it contrasts starkly with their every day life. Lee, a man who works as a mechanic in a plant production, commented: “I feel popular here. I feel liked here. Where I live right now, I am just another working guy. I just feel like another ant in the factory.”

In sum, as shown in the definition, there are three basic categories of participation in serious leisure: amateurism, hobbyist pursuits, and career volunteering. The serious visitors to the festival explored in this study can be described as a festival enthusiast that may fit into a category of hobbyist pursuits instead of amateurism. This is because the reenactment of Renaissance or Medieval era is not the primary function of long-term involvement with the festival. They do not emulate the professionals in terms of staging a performance but attempt to use the interactive performance as a way to enhance their experience during the festival.

### **Alienation**

The participants of this study were asked to describe their everyday life and the prominent experiences stemming from it. They have collectively suggested a varying degree of alienating experience in their everyday life. Furthermore, it was shown that the experience of alienation at home often acts as an impetus for the individuals to be engaged in the festival in a more serious manner. The concepts and categories related to the alienating experience were identified through the constant comparison technique employed in this study. The constant comparison between the emerging concepts and categories to the relevant literature suggested a close relevance between the typology of alienation by Seeman (1959; 1983; 1991) and the serious visitors’ alienating experience at home society.

Therefore, the following section briefly introduces Seeman (1959; 1983; 1991)'s social psychological experiences of alienation that consists of several dimensions. This typology provides a valid framework to understand the alienating experiences of several visitors interviewed in this study. Approaching the concept of alienation as individuals' subjective experience rather than as an attribute of social structure may help understand diverse tourism related experiences such as tourist motivations and experiences.

Seeman (1959; 1983; 1991) identified six dimensions of alienation that are not necessarily interconnected. These are: 1) powerlessness, 2) meaninglessness, 3) normlessness, 4) social isolation, 5) cultural disengagement, and 6) self-estrangement. Among these different types of alienation experiences, three types showed close relevance to the reported alienating experiences at their home environment. These include social isolation, cultural disengagement, and self-estrangement. It may be surprising to find that other dimensions of alienating experience (powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness) did not emerge from the collected data. There are some possible reasons for this somewhat unexpected result. This will be discussed in detail in the discussion chapter. In the meantime, this section presents each dimension that is empirically derived from this study with the study participants' detailed accounts. The dimensions of alienating experience are explained below as a following order: social isolation, cultural disengagement, and self-estrangement.

### **Social isolation**

A sense of social isolation is often caused by the loss of community, social supports, and friendship networks. A feeling of loneliness is the most typical individual experience as a result of social isolation. Much health literature indicates that the lack of supportive social networks is associated with diverse health problems because individuals' stressful circumstances are not well mediated. This illustrates the close association between a sense of social isolation and physical as well as psychological well-being of individuals.



Some of the interviewers of this study indicated a sense of social isolation they have to undergo in their everyday life. It appears that the lack of social network, at least for the interviewers of this study, arises because of the work environment where the establishment of close friendship is hard to attain. Bethany, a 26 Years old girl, explains her limited resource for meaningful social relationships.

I work in a conservative office. So, pretty much I go in and I do my work. And I don't really talk to people because that's not what you are doing in my office. You come in...you do your work. That's pretty much it. I live in College Station. All of our friends graduated in last year mid July. And so, really the only people I have known in area now are the people I work with. It's really hard for me to go out and party with them. Even just go out to dinner with them.

As shown her description, most of social life revolves around work environment especially in contemporary Western society. Because of lack of time and opportunity to develop meaningful human relationships away from work place, a sense of social isolation becomes a typical symptom for individuals living in such completely industrialized countries as the U.S (Putnam 1999). Sometimes, the source of isolation is derived from competitive nature of work environment where the evolvment of trusting relationships between colleagues seems to be limited. Dragonhawk, a man who works as an industrial sales representative, illustrates that: "I have difficulties with the outside world because...simply because you always gotta watch your back. You always gotta sit there and you gotta worry about your fellow workers screwing you to get ahead". That is, alienating condition of work environment tends to limit them to develop any kind of intimate friendships. Deborah also corroborates this: "I own my own business. It's very hard to establish friendships. I can't do that with the employees. They just run all over you. So, social life outside the festival is pretty limited based on that".

### **Cultural disengagement**

It refers to a sense of removal or distance from the dominant values in the society. One of the unique characteristics of the Texas Renaissance Festival visitors inquired within this study is in the relatively large presence of pagans; at least seven (out

of 37) participants of this study identified themselves as pagan. Pagan refers to a group of contemporary religions based on a reverence for nature. These faiths draw on the traditional religions of indigenous peoples throughout the world. Considering that Christianity is a dominant religious basis in the U.S., this number reflects a relatively large proportion of pagan among the participants of the festival (at least among the hard-core visitors). Since the dominant value of the U.S. society is closely associated with Christianity, the different religious orientation such as Paganism sometimes may act against one's integration into main stream culture, thus can be a source of alienation for certain individuals. It is realistic to assume that not all pagans are subject to a sense of removal or distance from the dominant Christianity based values just because of his/her religious orientation. However, for some pagans at least interviewed in this study, their different religious orientation such as Paganism that is not widely accepted in the mainstream society of the U.S. can act as a source of repudiation, thus can lead to a sense of alienation. One participant's comment reflects this alienating experience because of a different religion.

I am a pagan. I don't believe in the common Christian faith. It's not for me. A lot of people, especially in this part of country, have a real problem with that....I've grown passed really letting other people's opinion of how I feel affected me. But, for a long time, I did feel very uncomfortable. It was not so much telling people that I was a pagan, but their reactions when I told them. When they found out that I wasn't a good little Christian boy, they, a lot of times, react negatively. They don't take the time to find out who you are...There are a lot of pagans who come out to the Renaissance Festivals because they feel comfortable. They feel safe. They are not judged.

As described in his comments, some of the study participants indeed remarked that they value such a liberating atmosphere of the festival where they can reveal their religious orientations without concerning about other people's reactions. This indirectly reflects their cultural position as a marginalized group within the mainstream society and subsequently experienced alienation.

## Self-estrangement

Self-estrangement roughly refers to a mode of experience in which the person experiences him/herself as an alien. He/she has become, as the label indicates, estranged from him/herself. A majority of the study participants implicitly showed a sense of alienation that might fall into the categories of self-estrangement. Specifically, the experiences related to the categories of ‘despised’ self and ‘disguised’ self were prominent themes among the interviewers of this study.

*Despised self.* According to Seeman (1983), it indicates negatively evaluated discrepancies between the person’s preferred ideal and the perceived actual self, leading to low self-esteem. Several participants of this study explicitly or implicitly suggested that their perceived self-images are somewhat negative in their everyday life. The sources of such a negative discrepancy between the ideal and real-self encompass negative body images, perceived lack of economic and social capability, and undesirable personality traits. For example, one of the female participants of this study indicated that she used to have a very negative image on her body, which affects her personal and social life to a great extent and consequently leads to low self-esteem. Although many participants did not explicitly express their experiences related to low self-esteem, some said that they were able to regain their self-esteem through the long-term engagement with the festival and social circles formed through the festival. This appears to indirectly demonstrate that they experience low self-esteem in their everyday life.

*Disguised self.* It is related to “the failure to realize one’s truly human capabilities, or one’s true interests, or one’s true feelings” (Seeman 1983: 179). In this mode of experience, one tends to be out of touch with his/her true feelings maybe by overly adopting an impression management strategy in social life. Many participants of this study indicated that they could not reveal true-self both at work and home; the true-self, although not easy to define, seems to be related to expressing their true-emotion through words and actions. As a contemporary society is increasingly characterized as

“other” directed (Riesman 1950) or “narcissistic” (Lasch 1979), one is expected to manage his/her emotion in social relations to a great extent for the smooth social interactions. That is, Riesman (1950) maintains that in contemporary society a social approval becomes a crucial criterion to direct and evaluate one’s actions. In the process of seeking for social approval, one is required to manage (or sometimes suppress) his/her feelings in social relationships. Thus, one’s level of emotion management is often equated with a level of social skill. In this emotional oppressed society as the U.S., it is likely that one fails to realize his/her true feelings or emotions. Narcissistic personality which, as Lasch (1979) argues, is one of the defining quality of modern individuals’ mind-set also helps understand the disguised self. The narcissistic injury destroys the individual’s emerging self. Unable to express his/her true-self, the narcissistically injured person adapts dual personalities: the true-self and the false self. The real self becomes fragmented and repressed because of the narcissistic injury whereas the false self takes over the individual (disguised self). Given these personality traits pervading in the contemporary society, it is not surprising to see that a sense of disguised self (repressing one’s true feelings) is closely embedded in the participants’ everyday experiences.

It is often advocated that leisure/tourism activities serve as a medium to express one’s true-self. Put differently, it implies that one is not usually allowed to express his/her true-self at the sphere of work and public life. Thus, the experience of estranged self may be a defining quality of contemporary social life. Likewise, the participants of this study were also subject to this type of alienating experience in their everyday life.

The alienating experience described above seems to serve as a driving force for the serious participation in the festival. Metaphorically speaking, the visitors under study tend to search for the way to recuperate the alienating experience at home through the continuous engagement in this unique form of tourism. The experience they sought during the festival can be best understood as a contrast or reaction to their alienating experience at home environment. The following section of festival experience

(existential authenticity), therefore, needs to be understood in conjunction with the alienating experience in everyday life.

### **Festival Experience as Existential Authenticity**

The festival experiences identified through this study are reminiscent of Wang (1999)'s typology of tourism existential authenticity. The authentic experience based on existentialism is certainly distinguished from the object related authenticity which often indicates the level of historical accuracy (Cohen 1988; Handler and Saxton 1988; McCannell 1976). From an object-oriented perspective, tourists could experience authenticity only when toured objects are perceived to be authentic or genuine. Unlike this object related authenticity, existential authenticity in tourism indicates an "intensified and concentrated experience of an alternative Being-in-the-world" (Wang 2000: 65). The festival experiences explored within this study seem to fit into diverse dimensions of existential authenticity specified by Wang (1999). The dimensions of existential authenticity as it emerged from this study are two levels: intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal authenticity. Intrapersonal authenticity is further diversified into bodily feelings and self-making. Interpersonal authenticity also consists of two dimensions: touristic *communitas* and authentic playful human interaction. Although Wang (1999) specified interpersonal authenticity into family ties and tourism *communitas*, this study presents *communitas* and authentic playfulness as emerging themes. That is, the authenticity of human interactions being sought and experienced among the festival visitors can be divided into two dimensions. One is related to the *camaraderie feelings* evolved among the hard-core visitors of the festival. The other is a type of experience derived from the *playful interaction* between the hard-core visitors and casual visitors.

#### **Intra-personal authenticity: Bodily feelings**

The main principle of rationalization in modernity requires one to restrain the bodily impulses for the interest of social stability (Turner 1991). Consequently,

contemporary individuals learnt the self-control of bodily desires as a moral virtue, although it is indeed artificially imposed by social structure. A release of the bodily feelings (e.g., sensual desires), thus, can be conceived of as an act of regaining one's true human capability not controlled by social norms and regulations. It, in turn, becomes a significant element that allows one to attain a sense of authentic existence. Wang (1999: 362) suggests that "sensual pleasures, feelings, and other bodily impulses are to a relatively large extent released and consumed and the bodily desires (for natural amenities, sexual freedom, and spontaneity) are gratified intensively". In this sense, he proposes that tourism involves a bodily experience of personal authenticity. The Texas Renaissance Festival illustrates how such bodily intensive feelings are actively created and fulfilled among the visitors.

### Sexual experience

The hard core visitors appear to utilize the Texas Renaissance Festival as an outlet to satiate their underlying sexual desires. Conventionally, a libidinal power has been conceived of as an object of control with the growth of instrumental rationality (Turner 1991). Hence, an unbridled sexual desire can be regarded as an antithesis to the rationality embedded in modernity. If we accept the view that a sexual desire is inherent in fundamental human nature, then, a release of such desire can be perceived as an attempt to regain authentic feelings that has been restrained by rational but artificial social orders. As a liminal space where existing social norms of oppressing sexual desire are temporarily suspended, the festival provides the participants an opportunity to fulfill their sexual desire to a degree that is not often allowed in regular social contexts. The expression of sexual desires is usually undertaken only in the very private sphere. However, the festival implicitly promotes the licentious atmosphere and converts such intimate desires into an object of public enjoyment. Public expression of sexual desire is well reflected in diverse public nudity both within the festival and campground and fleeting encounters between the Ren'ies and casual visitors. For some, costuming offers them a chance to expose some intimate parts of their body in public, which is not usually

allowed in daily social contexts. For example, individuals who dress in barbarian costumes or chain mail costumes are given the opportunity to expose a large part of their bare skins with a degree of social acceptance. Underlying motivation for dressing in such costumes may be related to a sense of exhibitionism. In a psychological sense, the exhibition of intimate body parts in such a public space provides them a feeling of freedom. Although public nudity is usually taken to be a crime or moral disruption in regular social contexts, it seems rather naturally accepted for both spectators and performers. Of course, such exhibition of body parts affects the experience of other spectators who are allowed to stare at them in that it stimulates and fulfill their sexual desires vicariously to a great extent. One of the typical interactions between the costumed characters and casual visitors who are in regular clothing occurs when they take pictures together. The popular characters for a picture are usually ones in barbarian costumes and chain mail costumes who expose a large part of their bare skins. For both males and females in such costumes, they tend to emphasize their sexual attractiveness by showing their attractive body parts such as well-built muscles and half-exposed breasts. It is a typical scene that one in barbarian costume grabs a woman passing by and pose for a picture while other casual visitors are giggling and watching them. Although it seems fleeting and momentary experience, it gives both parties a chance to make a rather intimate skin contact between strangers and promotes a sexual fantasy.

Within the campground, the fulfillment of sexual desires tends to be intensified with more social approval since the campground is regarded as a kind of sanctuary for the hard-core visitors. Since inside the festival is for diverse combination of visitors that include a high presence of family groups, many social and legal regulations still tend to limit some extreme exhibitionistic behaviors. However, when they retreat to the campground, such social regulations become much more loosened. Consequently, public nudity also becomes more intense within the campground. Once in a while, there occurs a nude party which sometimes involves 30 to 40 individuals (both males and females) at night. Such a party is not likely to be planned ahead but spontaneous. Mark, a man who is a head of a Chaos group, remarks, "You just never know what's going to

happen in a campground. Last night, we just had a nude party. We just all got drunk and naked. You just never know what's going to happen out there". The flogging practice, which often occurs within the campground at night among the intimate group members, illustrates the fulfillment of their sexual desires in a playful manner. Grune, a man who has been coming to this festival over five years, commented that: "It is a tradition in the fair society. When somebody starts going to Renaissance Festival unless they are opposed to it, they will be bent over and they will be flogged...There is a large amount of sexual stimulation involved in good flogging. It's entertaining. It's another way of having fun". As he described, the flogging practice is considered to be a type of initiation for those who starts coming to the campground and attempts to join the sub-culture created among the festival visitors. This practice exemplifies the fulfillment of sexual desires woven into their experiences.

The sexually loosened atmosphere within the camp ground tends to encourage many festival visitors to solicit the actual sexual relationships among other festival visitors. Since they are often engaged in excessive drinking while staying at the camp ground, the actual sexual relations are likely to occur even between the total strangers. One of the most common expression used among the festival visitors says "Anything that happens in the festival stays in the festival." This indicates a temporary license of such a sexual indulgence during the festival. Anonymity assured among the festival visitors facilitates a sexual relation. The nature of such relationship tends to be casual and is not likely to be developed in a serious relationship. Darrell illustrates such casual nature of sexual relationships made in the campground: "I used to come out here for sex. Honestly, we would have competitions to see who could lay the most women in one day. Literally. Whoever won, you had to buy the next guy beer the next day. You had to bring the girl and say, yes we had sex. You couldn't just say two girls here and one girl". While it is probable that only a small segment of the visitors is actually involved with such a sexual relation, the idea of such behavior is strongly imbued in many of the festival visitors. In spontaneous, unsolicited testimony, many festival visitors report that "the camp ground is the best place to get laid if you are willing to take the chance." That



is, the fantasy of “sex with strangers” is actually believed and performed among the festival visitors with the aid of morally loosened atmosphere. In sum, the festival (particularly the campground) offers them a sexual license which allow them to fulfill their sexual desire in a manner which is not usually permitted in their daily social contexts. The fulfillments of sexual desires occur in various ways that include public nudity, flogging practice, and fleeting sexual relationships.

#### Alcohol and food consumption

Conventionally, the festivity involves a fair amount of food and drink for individuals. As Berk (1978) noted, the traditional European Carnivals offer the commoners a chance to gorge themselves with a variety of foods and drinks that are not available in daily living contexts. Because such European Carnivals have been utilized as a basic model for the construction of the Texas Renaissance Festival, it attempts to facilitate the consumption of foods and drinks as a way of constructing the atmosphere of festivity. Of course, for the festival as a commercial enterprise, such a large scale consumption of food and alcohol becomes a major source of their revenue. The practice of alcohol consumption within the festival appears to provide a unique feeling that is not easily attainable in regular public bars. People are allowed to drink freely within the festival ground as well as the campground. Although the festival is an enclosed space which has a physical boundary (the stone and wooden wall) separating inside and outside the festival, because of its huge size (54 acres) and constructed village atmosphere, it creates a more liberating feeling that they drink in public space. The individuals staying overnight at the campground usually start drinking during the day within the festival site, and such drinking is carried on to the campground. Indeed, drinking is an omnipresent scene found at the campground at night and seems to be a major component that characterizes the experiences of the festival participants. A considerable number of the campers tends to be engaged in excessive drinking. The engagement in such binge drinking may be attributable to the nature of the festival as a liminal space. The constraints that tend to limit excessive drinking practice in everyday

social contexts are diminished to a great extent at the festival (particularly at the campground). Self-control on excessive drinking derived from the dominant value against binge drinking (and also food consumption), daily obligations to be met, and various regulations associated with alcohol consumption are the examples of such constraints that inhibit excessive addiction to drinking practice in daily life contexts. However, those constraints become ineffective largely because of the shared understanding that they are in a break from everyday life. Shannon pointed out that: “I like the idea of getting drunk for entire weekend and not having to drive anywhere”. Thus, a binge drinking practice is carried out as a part of ritualistic practices that facilitate a feeling of temporary liberation (from various social and moral constraints). In addition, there circulates a home-made liquor, referred to as LOKI, among the hard-core visitors. The LOKI exemplifies the close association between drinking and festival experiences. LOKI is a term for a type of liquor that is made by mixing regular brand liquor with syrups of diverse flavors. Similar to the flogging practice, drinking LOKI is conceived of as a routine practice among several groups of the visitors. It symbolizes personal freedom of excessive alcohol consumption within the campground. Hence, many anecdotes happened around the campground are associated with drinking LOKI. Dedrick described:

One of our brothers last year, he decided to drink a bottle of LOKI by himself. We said, don't do it! But he drank it. Next morning, he woke up on the hood of his car, completely naked. He had twelve phone numbers on his thigh. He goes, what happened to me? Did you drink that whole bottle? I told you not to do that. What are these numbers? Oh, write them down and call the numbers. Those are the ones who saw you drunk last night. They can tell you what happened. Oh, yeah! That's right. He called every number. Each one of them had something to tell him. I did what? I did that? You gotta be kidding!

#### Relaxation/being in the nature

The festival as a temporary break from their work life provides them to relax physically as well as psychologically. The attainment of bodily relaxation often requires spatial change as well as temporal change. That is, individuals can have their body more

relaxed when they leave their everyday and work environments. Particularly, the language of relaxation in tourism is often associated with one being in the natural environments. Increasing urbanization in modern society is likely to create an urge for urban residents to experience nature they lost touch with in their daily urban life (Macnaghten and Urry 2001). An inclination to be affiliated with nature is often reflected in such diverse forms of nature tourism as camping, mountaineering, and so on. A majority of the interviewers of this study were also found to be city dwellers where they are surrounded by man-made structures. Apart from their daily living conditions, the camp ground offers them an opportunity to be affiliated with the nature. Bethany, a woman from a metropolitan area, indicates a proclivity to experience the nature through the festival which is in contrast to urban landscape.

I love coming out here... most every Renaissance festival that I have ever been to is pretty much out in the middle of nowhere. There is no city around, no traffic, no noise. It's really nice just coming out and being surrounded by trees and...being able to look up the stars at night. Usually, every weekend, I come out here and I spend at least thirty minutes to spying in the back of my car looking up the stars.

Away from the hectic urban environment, they are able to attain a more relaxed lifestyle where they can immerse themselves into the natural environment. That is, the festival participation in a way helps them to regain the inherent bond between their body and the nature which was artificially disconnected by modern urbanization.

### **Intra-personal authenticity: Self-making**

Wang (1999) maintained that self-making or self identity is an implicit dimension sought through touristic activities occurring outside ordinary life because “everyday and work roles impose constraining and monotonous routine in which individuals find it difficult to pursue their self-realization”. The festival participants interviewed in this study also reported a varying degree of self-related experience. One of the interviewers commented that: “You don’t always wanna be yourself. You get tired of being yourself every day. And you wanna be a different person. This is our

opportunity to be somebody that we can never be” (Shannon). This comment reveals that the self-transformation is one of the most important dimensions that determine their experiences during the festival. The underlying motivation for such transformation of self stems from escapism. A variety of social and self regulations derived from their everyday and work roles place a certain boundary for their self-perception and subsequent actions in regular social contexts. Given that, the perception of everyday self may become a major source of anxiety or boredom for some individuals. Conversely, transformation of everyday self is an act of overcoming a sense of anxiety or boredom, which consequently leads to enhanced freedom and satisfaction.

#### Rituals of self-transformation

The transformation of self within the festival is realized through a combination of distinctive ritualistic practices: the use of fictitious name, costuming, assuming a festival character, and the following interactions with other festival visitors.

*Festival name:* The use of fictitious name is an almost universal practice among the hard-core visitors to the festival. During the festival, they always refer to each other by their festival name instead of their real names. With few exceptions, they only know each other by their festival name. George remarked: “Most of the people I know with few exceptions, I only know their festival names. I am surprised when I find out what their mundane and real life name is. For instance, Regina was the one that introduced me to Joe who I realized is the Lord Entropy. When I always saw him, I always think of him as his festival name”. Given that the name is the most fundamental element that constitutes one’s identity, the use of fictitious name may be the first step to escape from their everyday self and be immersed into different selves. Dragonhawk described: “You can be anything that you wanna be. If you wanna be a king, you can be a king. If you wanna be a beggar, you can be beggar. And having Ren fair name kind of helps you break away from the mundane world into this magical world”. The fictitious names they use during the festival are often associated with their heritage or ideal characters from

some fantasy novels. This indicates that the use of such festival names is actually an expression of their hidden (or desired) self.

*Costuming:* Along with the use of festival names, costuming is an obligatory practice among the hard-core visitors. The expressed reason for dressing in a specific costume seems to be diverse: a celebration of his/her authentic heritage, an identification with some imaginary characters, an expression of certain body-parts, etc. For example, Knight Wing, one who wears barbarian costume over 20 years during the festival, described the association with personal heritage: “By nature, I am a barbarian. I am a true Celtic. My ancestry is Celtic barbarian. My heritage and background created who I am”. However, the underlying motivation for such diverse costuming practices is to experience different aspects of self that are not confined to the qualities endowed by their everyday and work roles. By donning the costumes that usually portray some imaginary characters, they are able to disguise their physical appearance and to assume the characters they portray. Mark, a man who dresses in black leather armor, described his experience with costuming:

I remember the first time I put the armor on. I looked in the reflection of my truck and I was like, that’s me? And that’s before I lost all my weight, but even then I had a different aspect of myself. You know, putting your armor on makes a difference because you’re now able to get away with more and I even noticed that helmet that I wear encloses my face. And that one day I ran around without a helmet on. I realized that I wasn’t terrorizing, as we call it, as viciously as I usually would with a helmet on because my face was exposed and people could see me.

As shown in his description, a costuming practice allows them to change not only their physical appearance but also mind-set. The transformed mind-set through assumed characters provides them a sense of freedom in various ways. Most notably, they become free from social judgment because they do not play their everyday roles associated with a certain level of social expectation. Jennifer pointed out: “You don’t have to worry about what somebody is gonna think of me if I do or say this because

you're dressed up and you are playing a role." By assuming different characters than everyday self, they give themselves a license to act in a way that is often contrasted to their everyday and work roles.

*Assuming a festival character:* The creation of characters obtained through costuming and fictitious names often reflects the desire to express their idealized self. As much psychology literature indicates, the discrepancy between the perceived self and ideal self becomes a strong motivator for individuals to behave in a way to shorten the gap. Within this study, the festival offers them a chance to diminish such discrepancy between real self and ideal self by allowing them to play out some imagined characters at least temporarily. Regina, a woman who plays out fairy angel character, illustrates this point.

I can come out and be somebody else. My character is who I would be. You know, she is a beautiful character. She is like my altered ego. It's like I didn't have to put up with all the stuff that went on in the world and all the bad things that are going. And she is where I would be. She is really a part of me. I mean it's not really that she is completely different from me. She is just a part of me. She is like all the beautiful things about me that I would like to bring out but I can't really bring that out in society 'cause it just doesn't work there. But it works here. It's nice to be able to show that.

As illustrated in her account, they tend to selectively adopt an idealized aspect of self and weave it into their whole persona. Costuming and assumed characters allow them to amplify the desired self traits into her/his whole persona. Given that clothing is often believed to be a representative of one's sociocultural identity that sets a psychological as well as behavioral boundary, costuming can be considered as an aid to manipulate their self image in public. Violet's description accounts for the function of the costume in transforming self:

If I am in garb, I can be more easily assumed that personality trait that I am wearing to that day than I was in normal clothe. The insecurity that I feel in normal life is more present when I have my normal clothes on. It's my

normal...where the insecurities and work and all the stresses of normal life are there. But when I put on my garb, they are gone. I can more fully immerse myself into the character.

*Interactions with other festival visitors:* Altered image of self displayed in public also tends to determine the nature of interactions with other people within the festival. The interactions with casual visitors, in most occasions, are based on role-playing. They tend to assume the characters constructed through costuming and fictitious names and act in accordance with the characters. For instance, when they are in a barbarian costume which is the most popular character among the hard-core visitors, they attempt to portray the barbarian personality by speaking and acting in a rather crude and outrageous manner that is not often acceptable in everyday social contexts. Such a rough personality often portrayed in the festival is contrary to the desirable attributes of social being in contemporary society. The complex social relationships that characterize contemporary society tend to require one to manage his/her emotion in a way to diminish any possible conflicts. Indeed, a degree of emotion control and disguise of one's true feeling in displaying self in public are often equated with a level of social skill (Riesman 1950). However, such impression management can drain their emotion and suppress the desire to express their true feelings (Goffman 1959). Hence, it may act as a source of alienation. In this sense, donning the barbarian costumes and assuming such personality can expand the boundary to express their true desires and feelings that are not allowed to be displayed in regular social encounters because barbarian characters are believed to be stripped of such desirable social attributes.

#### Emerging self through the rituals of self-transformation

The rituals of self-transformation occurring at the festival consequently contribute to a change (whether permanent or temporary) in self perceptions through the process of self-empowerment, self-esteem, and identity construction.

*Self-empowerment:* Playing a fictitious character within the festival tends to provide them a sense of power. Obviously, a sense of power stems from the characters that transcend their perceived everyday self. By donning the costumes, they change their appearance in a radical manner. The changed appearance helps them strongly identify with the characters depicted by the costume, and the reactions from other people are also likely to vary in accordance with the character. The combination of such assumed characters and the following reactions from other people have them achieve a sense of power that is not easily attainable in daily social interactions. One of the interviewers illustrated this:

Yea, you feel powerful. Like my wife, she's 4'11" and she's not very big, so people out in the real world kind of just blow up her off. She's an ex-prison guard. She can take down a 300 pound man with no problem. But people don't pay her the respect she deserves. But in here, when she's in her armor or dressed in her pirates outfit like today, she gets respect. People will get the hell out of her way quickly. And they're like, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! My lady, whatever you want.

The engagement in role-playing endows them a contrasting role to the casual visitors. They often perceive themselves as a type of actor while perceiving the casual visitors as a spectator. In this sense, the festival is viewed as a stage for them to play out their characters. Assuming a role of performer within the festival gives them a sense of power to manipulate the interactions with the casual visitors. That is, as a performer, they are likely to gain the power to control spectators' emotion and actions. However, such a sense of power is different from the one derived from regular social relations in that the source of power is not from social hierarchical positions but from their true human capability to manipulate others' emotions. Darrell remarked:

I feel more strongly about how powerful my actions, and what I say has a lot more power. Even when I am at work, I am the boss. I have to tell people what to do. But, those people don't usually smile back at me when I tell'em what to do. But, when I come out here and joke around with people, they are usually laughing about it...I am looking for some reaction when I come. If I get that reaction, then I am proud that I was able to pull it out of it.



*Self-esteem:* Costuming and subsequent interactions with casual visitors are likely to enhance their self-esteem. As most of the hard-core visitors with few exceptions are in elaborate costumes which are not of everyday scene, they serve as an attraction for the casual visitors and often become an object of gaze through camera and video camera. Indeed, taking pictures are the most typical interaction between the casual visitors and the hard-core visitors. And most of the interviewers indicated that they pose for a picture numerous times while they are being inside the festival roaming around. In most cases, such a public attention from a considerable number of people (particularly from the casual visitors) is likely to give them an opportunity to reevaluate themselves in contrast to their everyday self. The sense of unique self-hood which has been submerged in everyday work role is revived through such a public recognition. It makes them feel special as if they are on the stage and become an important person for the rest of the public. Grune commented that “I got stopped twice today. Excited! Flattered! It feels great. You feel absolutely amazing. All of sudden, you realize, wait a minute! There is something about the way I look. Did that person really want to remember me so bad? They wanna take a picture. That’s a hell of compliment”.

Also, the active interactions with the casual visitors give a rise to the *self-confidence*. When they role-play with the casual visitors, they are always likely to take an initiative for the interactions and lead them as they would like to. Playing as if they are an actor within the festival, most of the interviewers expressed a strong sense of pride that they are the ones that actually build up the festival experience of the casual visitors. The perceived power of creating somebody else’s experience helps them (re)gain confidence about one’s capability of controlling environment. According to Seeman (1992), the sense of powerlessness indicates the expectancy or perception that one’s own behavior cannot control the occurrence of personal and social outcomes since such control is vested in external forces. The interaction with the casual visitors enables them to overcome the sense of powerlessness that is often derived from contemporary social conditions: bureaucratic and complex expert dependent social systems (Giddens 1990). The temporary recovery of one’s perceived power through such interaction helps

them to reevaluate the self-image and often leads to the elevated self-esteem. Violet's description of her interaction with the casual visitor illustrates one way they gain their self-esteem through interaction.

Most of time, I portray a wench. I walk through the fair looking for people who don't look happy and flirt with them...I was telling my husband that one of my favorites is winching about ninety year old man in wheelchair. He was miserable. His daughter and his son-in-law had brought him out trying to do something. His wife died a couple of months earlier and he had been just miserable. So, I walked up and talked to him for a couple of minutes. And before I left, I blessed his cheek with kiss. And he was like smiling. So, I kissed some other cheek and I walked off. His daughter found me later that day. She was like, I just have to thank you. Since my mother died, he has been miserable. He has been angry. There was never a moment that he has any peace or any happiness. After you left, he laughed for the first time in month....All these increase the confidence in myself in the sense that I can make a difference in the world.

*Constructing self-identity:* Most of the interviewers of this study indicated that the festival participation resulted in radical change on their self-perceptions at least during the festival. The changed self-perceptions are mostly derived from costuming practices, role-playing with the casual visitors, and continuing interactions within the group members. However, whether the temporary transformation of self during the festival has any enduring effect on their construction of everyday self is open to speculation. For some, the perceived change of self through costuming and role-playing has a real effect on the way they see themselves outside the festival. Mark, a man who is a head of sub-culture group called 'Chaos', describe the effects of the festival experience on constructing his personality.

I was real shy. I didn't really consider myself that outgoing. I didn't consider myself that attractive of a person. I didn't see anything in me that I thought anybody would like. Once I developed this character and started coming out here and when you stand here and pose for 400 and 500 pictures a day and you've got women grabbing you on your butt...Damn where'd all this stuff come from? You had no idea it was in you... I've gotten a lot more open, I'm not as shy as I used to be and I've got a whole lot more positive self-impression. I guess you could say since I've developed this character and started doing this. But it is not just because of the character, it's not just because of the armor, it's

because I get the interaction from all these people plus there's 150 people out there who elected me as their fair leader and they want my opinion on stuff. I'd have to say this has changed my whole life and I guess it's just allowed me to be the person that was inside me I just couldn't see before.

Whereas, for others, such transformation of self remained only in the festival and did not exert any power on their everyday self outside the festival. This differential effect on self-perception may be attributed to the degree of involvement with the sub-culture of the festival. Those who indicated a temporary change of self only within the festival are likely to take the festival as a temporary opportunity to escape from their everyday life. On the other hand, those who indicated a rather permanent change of their self-perception tend to perceive the festival as an alternative life style; this is reflected in their enduring involvement with the sub-culture outside the Texas Renaissance Festival through participation in other similar types of events and on-going contacts with the festival friends. In sum, the festival participation entails costuming, the use of character name, role-playing with the casual visitors, and interactions among the hard-core members. These are essential components that affect their self-perception within the festival. The radically transformed appearance and anonymity obtained through costuming and the assumed characters provides them a temporary license to express their authentic self in the public which is not usually accepted in their everyday social contexts. The perceived authentic (or true) self is usually described in contrast to their everyday and work roles. Therefore, it appears that the projected image of self within the festival is a reflection of the marginalized but desired aspect of self that is not successfully fulfilled in everyday life. The portrayal of such desired aspect self tends to be endorsed and reinforced through the interactions with the casual visitors. Public recognition expressed in taking pictures is perceived as an endorsement of the character with which they strongly identify. This, in turn, leads to the enhanced self-esteem. Also, the role-playing interaction with the casual visitors helps them gain the sense of power in social relationships, hence increase the self-confidence. Consequently, both contribute to maintaining one's positive self-image within the festival. In some cases, this transient experience with the self is extended to their real life outside the festival and results in the

permanent change of personality. However, the degree of such enduring effects seems to vary depending on their level of involvement with the sub-culture of the festival.

### **Inter-personal authenticity: Touristic *communitas***

As Wang (1999) notes, tourism can generate authentically experienced human relationships particularly among tourists because of liminal quality of touristic spaces and time. Liminality, according to Turner, indicates “any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life”. Tourism viewed as a temporal escape from everyday socioeconomic structure is often defined as a liminal zone where socioeconomic distinctions of tourists are stripped off to a great extent (Graburn 1983, 1989; Lett 1983). Tourists simultaneously entering the liminality tend to confront each other as social equals based on their common humanity. Thus, it has been suggested that such an unmediated humanistic relationship constitutes an important axis of tourism experience. The Texas Renaissance Festival explored in this study is reminiscent of tourism liminal space in which the profane existence of the work-a-day world and media, rules, and hierarchies are avoided at least temporarily. The participants of the festival interviewed in this study indicated that they use the festival as a venue to experience authentic human interactions not bounded by institutionalized socioeconomic and sociopolitical positions, status, and roles.

Most of the interviewers of this study pointed out that the strong camaraderie feelings created among the hard-core visitors are the main component that draws them to the festival continuously. The camaraderie experience occurring among the hard-core visitors reflects “*communitas*” in a Turnerian sense. Turner (1969) defines it as “unmediated human relationship”. The arise of *communitas* is attributable to a state of liminality or liminoid. Because the festival participation results from voluntary choice rather than a ritual obligation, Turner (1982) suggests that it be regarded as liminoid rather than liminal. According to Turner, it means that truly transformative experiences, like rites of passage, are unlikely. Rather, it is likely to act as a forum for the search of self (Torgovnick 1997) or promote a spontaneous camaraderie feeling (Arnold and Price

1993). However, there has been little empirical research that clearly distinguishes the actual effects of two different states. Turner himself was not consistent in distinguishing between liminal and liminoid in terms of its effects. Driver (1991) contends that the dichotomy is ultimately unsustainable. Since the regular human relationships are occurring within the institutionalized social contexts, the human inter-relationships are subject to the normative constraints given to each social actor. In this sense, the unmediated human relationships are achievable only when individuals are out of social contexts governed by the normative constraints just as the festival participants are situated in.

### The liminoid

There are two distinctive features of the Texas Renaissance Festival that give rise to a state of liminal, different from the one in their home world, and one that enables them to transcend who they were in regular life. First, *the theme of the festival is Renaissance period which is not associated with their everyday concerns*. By entering the festival, they tend to change their mind set as if they are in different time period. John comments, “The first step of Renaissance festival is that we admit that once we get to Renaissance fair, then our lives are Renaissance”. The atmosphere constructed around the theme of Renaissance period provides them not only a spatial escape but also a temporal escape from an everyday world. A costuming practice enhances the feeling of temporal escape into the different period. Jennifer’s description of her experience illustrates that.

It feels kind of magical. It’s like you can just kind of leave the twentieth century at the door especially if you’re dressed up. I can experience that now because when we first went, we didn’t dress up very much. We just kind of felt like we are on the outside looking in. But, when you dress up even if you are not an official festival performer, you can kind of pretend that you are somebody from that time. You can sort of put on your costume and step back in time.

Second, *the festival is obviously a time out of their obligatory routines*. The use of festival name and playing a role that transcends everyday and work roles provides them

a temporary liberation from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses. Away from home and work places in a spatiotemporal sense, they free themselves from various social norms and regulations associated with obligatory tasks of everyday life. Given the shared feeling of liberation from everyday social existence, actions that are considered to be eccentric and deviant in regular social contexts tend to be accepted and sometimes encouraged to a great extent. The festival tends to bind the visitors together in a liminoid zone and allows an intimate social experience to occur. The creation of intimacy and experience of *communitas* have been noted in such diverse emotional intensive leisure activities as water rafting (Arnold and Price 1993), Mountain Men rendezvous-reenactment of Western frontier mountain men (Belk and Costa 1998), and sky-diving (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993). The communal experiences among the hard-core visitors within this study include several important elements that are equally shared by them.

#### Festival as a sacred ground for group intensification

The first component is related to the shared feeling that they are driven by similar interests or goals. That is, a feeling of we-ness as opposed to others arises mainly due to the shared belief that they are all into a sub-cultural world that is different from the main stream world. The level of commitment to the festival is often displayed through the elaboration on their costume and staying at the camping ground over nights. Debi comments: "It's like a little secret society. We are all in costume. We all know where we are camping. We are all in the same little world out here". The awareness that they are drawn to the festival not by some artificial force (or obligatory tasks) but by their own voluntary will allows them to perceive each other as a part of spontaneous community created within the festival. Gina also provides a similar perspective on this.

We have a lot more in common. You know why? Because we didn't just meet each other because we were working together or whatever. We all came here on purpose. This is kind like a faith. I mean, we are all here 'cause we wanna be, not 'cause we have to go to work, not 'cause your family or you got married into one of them. We are out here and didn't know each other. A lot of us only met

out here. So, it's kind of faith that we all have the evidently same kind of feeling for it.

Such a feeling of we-ness driven by shared experience and interest is reinforced through the intimate interaction among the hard-core visitors. Particularly, the campground where most of people are considered to be regular visitors to this festival permits them to interact with each other in a more intimate manner because of the lack of interference and the nature of leisure time. Since many of electronic devices (phone and television) that may cause a significant disconnection of direct human communication are not typically present at the camp ground, more intense communication can occur between each other. Also, since they are away from their obligatory tasks (e.g., work roles) of everyday life, they can interact with each other in a more relaxed manner which allows more intimate relationships to arise. In this sense, Gina continues to argue:

I feel freer when I am out here because I don't have to do anything other than set up a camping stuff. People eat and visit. I don't have to worry about children. I don't have to worry about my phone ringing. I don't have to worry about people stopping by my house. Out here, it's nothing but a social event...You go to friend's house and what's gonna happen. The TV is gonna be on in the background. Kids are gonna be running around. The phone is gonna ring. Here, we don't have nothing better to do but sit there and talk to one another...you get that connection. When we sit and talk to somebody, you know that person is really listening to you. You know, they are really interested because there are not many interferences.

As shown, the festival (particularly the camp ground) is perceived as a sacred realm that is set aside for the intimate connection between individuals of the similar interest. The perceived sacredness of the festival is also illustrated in their reluctance to bringing outside social and political issues to the discussion which are often denigrated as "mundane" or "social drama" by them. The disengagement in such profane sphere allows them to be more immersed in the atmosphere of brotherhood and sisterhood.

### Equality

The creation of intimacy and subsequent sense of community is achieved through a feeling of equality that exists in the festival. As the festival is claimed to be the largest one of the kinds, it attracts a considerable number of people with different social backgrounds. A variety of social backgrounds (occupation, education, religious belief, political orientation, and etc) fall apart during the festival. Obviously, the assumed character through the use of festival name and costuming facilitates the process. As discussed, they rarely make reference to their social or occupational status at home. They typically refer to each other as their festival name. And the discussion of outside social issues is likely to be ostracized, thus oftentimes their political and religious orientations do not come into the surface while staying at the festival. Being stripped of such social attributes, they confront each other as social equals. Thus, it is not social hierarchical positions but fundamental human nature that connects each other during the festival. Fritz comments:

This is a town of a lot of like-minded people. You got lawyers. You got doctors out here. You got stock market people. And you got people that work for freaking burgers and stuff. But, when they are out here, they are all brothers...This is an unplugged time from everyday life. You put all that stuff aside.

### Acceptance

Confronting each other as an equal human being, there arises an ambience of acceptance. Despite the diversity of the individuals in their backgrounds, there exist only harmonious relationships with the great acceptance of the diversity. For example, such an ambience of acceptance actually plays a significant role in attracting pagans to the festival. For those in Paganism, the festival is perceived as a safe outlet to express themselves in public without concerning about how people may judge them in light of their religious belief. With the heightened atmosphere of openness toward social and cultural distinctions, the sense of alienation present in both social and cultural realm of their everyday life is relieved during the festival. Given that, it is not surprising that



most of the interviewers of this study described the festival as a stress reliever inducing a high level of liberating feeling from societal constraints. To the extent that they feel free from the existing social norms and values, they find it easy to display “true selves” confronting each other during the festival. In turn, the achievement of authentic self is closely linked to the experience of *communitas*. The experience of unmediated human relationship essentially entails an encounter between the leveled and individuated human beings. The preservation of individuality as well as social equality is essential for the experience of *communitas*. When one occupies certain social roles (stemmed from inauthentic social hierarchy and status) often requiring a degree of impression management, the subsequently experienced human interaction is more likely to be attributed not to the “true self” but to the inauthentic social self. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that inter-personal authentic experience can occur only while one is engaged in intra-personal authentic state (true-self).

The community ambiance created within the campground is often reflected in their openness to other visitors particularly at the camp ground. They feel free to visit each other’s tent even during the night and ask for something they need. Moreover, they often exhibit unguarded and open hospitality even towards perfect strangers. Dragon Hawks describes this.

One of things that our clan tries to do at the end of each fair that we go to the last weekend...we try to have a feast. Just invite perfect strangers. Perfect strangers, people that you never met. People that you will never meet again. You know, like yesterday. I was going around people camping over there saying come eat with us. And other people, they charge for that. We don’t. A lot of people were saying, how much does it cost? No charge! It’s our way of saying we had a great year. Welcome to us.

Such an atmosphere of acceptance, equality, and friendliness makes it relatively easy for the regular visitors to make new friends during the festival. Particularly, costuming practice (as it is visibly noticeable) allows them to identify each other more easily and promotes a feeling of we-ness among the individuals in costume. Also, the relaxed atmosphere and relatively concentrated period of time facilitate the intensive social

interaction among the visitors especially at the camp ground. Indeed, the camp ground is often perceived as a sacred space for the regular visitors to have a bonding experience between each other. Knight Wing comments: “To us, the fair isn’t the fair. This out here the campground is the fair to us. This is where we bond”.

#### Enduring bonding: evolving into a normative communitas

According to Turner (1982), the state of spontaneous communitas (coincides with touritic communitas described above) soon evolves into normative communitas where another set of social roles and statuses is created. Because a spontaneous communitas is not a permanent condition but a phase or a moment, individuals attempt to maintain spontaneous relationships on a permanent basis. As a result, the human relationships free from social structural elements (roles and statuses) in a mode of spontaneous communitas become converted into norm-governed relationships. However, as Turner continues to argue, a sense of freedom, caring, or love still adheres to normative communitas despite the evolvement of strict regulations and norms. Such evolving nature of communitas is well reflected in this study.

It was observed that the instant friendships or camaraderie feelings created during the festival tend to evolve into a social group with certain structures and regulations. Indeed, there exist numerous groups of different size and characteristics within the festival. They are all voluntarily formed social groups of which main function is to provide a forum for the people of similar interest to flock together. During the festival period, they tend to camp together and interact with each other. Although many of the groups have some type of membership mostly activated by existing members’ approval, they tend to remain open to outside people including other group members. Often, such social groups found in the festival are not necessarily exclusive to each other in that one can have several memberships at the same time. Social interactions within the groups are not limited to the festival. Many of the hard-core visitors (often regardless of their memberships) tend to have a regular meeting outside the festival,

which indicates a role of such groups as their major social circle even in their everyday life.

While they hold very intimate relationships between each other, the groups tend to play a major role in their everyday life. Not only do they act as a source of friendship, but also they tend to provide some tangible support when needed. James Hamilton, a member of Chaos (one of the largest groups in the festival), illustrates this.

We have hundreds of people we know. So, if someone has a sickness or something, we put out over the Internet that “so and so” needs some help. We’ll pitch in, even if everybody just pitches in a dollar or two or something. Or sometimes, like my wife got sick last year and had to have emergency surgery. And so I had to take off from work for a while, and we got a little behind bills and stuff. They brought us food, a bunch of money they collected, which we didn’t ask for but they were like “we’re gonna help ya’ll out”. We do it for anybody that’s in our group ‘cause this group is closer than most families are. We know everything about everybody. Everybody knows if there’s a problem, we all work it out.

Because of such an intimate relationship between the members of a group, they often identify each other as a *family*. As Robert says, “It’s a family by choice instead of by blood”. Although many of them remain close contact with each other, it is not always possible for them to see each other in their everyday life due to many constraints (e.g., work schedule, distant residence, and etc). The festival, in this sense, is utilized as a *sacred time* for them to bond each other without being confined to societal constraints.

In sum, the hard-core visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival tend to experience authentic inter-personal relationships as well as authentic self. The inter-personal relationship among the hard-core visitors reflects the experience of *communitas* to a great extent. Stripped of social distinctions derived from social hierarchy and statuses, they confront each other as a social equal, and accept a distinct individuality to a great extent. Such an ambience helps them affirm the existence of humanity in inter-personal relationships which are not often attainable outside the festival. It was also found that the friendships developed within the festival often develop into a formalized group that is extended to their everyday life. This reflects the development of a spontaneous

communitas into a normative communitas as theorized by Turner (1982). That is, as a touristic communitas created within the festival is only a momentary experience in nature, it soon evolves into a normative communitas where the transitory relationship becomes more permanent with more regulations and norms. The experience of touristic communitas and continuing relationships through a normative communitas (evolvment of rather institutionalized social groups) among the hard-core visitors reflects the extent to which the fundamental human needs to belong is fulfilled in tourism activities.

### **Authentic playful human interaction: Homo-ludens**

The interpersonal authentic experience is not limited to the communitas (experience of intimate relationship) stemming from the interactions between the hard-core visitors. The interactions between the casual visitors and the hard-core visitors, often characterized by spontaneous role-play, also contributes to the rise of another type of inter-personal authentic experience, namely, *authentic playful human interaction*.

### Festival as a form of play

The nature of interactions that are occurring among the festival visitors fall into Huizinga's (1980: 13) definition of play:

Play is a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space...It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to...stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

For the visitors, the festival participation and subsequently involved actions are voluntary in nature as it is their free time activity which does not accrue any material interest. Also, the festival occurs outside the realm of their daily life. Perceived as a liminoid space, there is an implicit agreement among the visitors that various actions within the festival are not likely to cause any significant impact on the complex reality

outside the festival. Within the boundary, it promotes a special feeling among the individuals who participate in the playful interactions. As Huizinga (1980:12) notes, play facilitates “the feeling of being apart together in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms...” While the interactive experience among the serious visitors tends to be centered on a sense of community or *communitas*, the rather impulsive role-playing interaction between the hard-core visitors and the casual visitors tends to generate a fundamental *inter-personal enjoyment*.

Despite the fact that they are also the patrons to the festival, the hard-core visitors are likely to assume themselves as a type of performer while perceiving the casual visitors as spectators. Such a division of perceived role within the festival is represented through different designations that separate them from the casual visitors. It was often noticed that they label themselves as “playtron” while calling the casual visitors as “mundane”. Obviously, the “playtron” is an invented term that combines the words “play” and “patron”. This term reflects their voluntary role as a performer during the festival. On the other hand, the term, mundane, reflects their perception that the casual visitors are mere spectators who do not fully join the social world created within the festival. As the name “playtron” indicates, they attempt to interact with the casual visitors on the basis of spontaneous role playing. The casual visitors tend to act along with the improvised role play because of the implicit understanding that they are outside of everyday social context. A description of Mark, a man who portrays a medieval barbarian (warrior) character, illustrates the typical interaction with the casual visitors at the festival.

There was a family here on vacation. And they didn't know where the fantasy ended and reality began. Tallen and I had been going around taking these girls captive. We had them all on leashes and we were going around from shop to shop, saying we're here to collect taxes, either give us 200 gold or one tasty which is our word for a girl. Well, these people were handing their girls over to us and we were putting them in shackles and leading them around. So, we went up to the King Arthur character and said, what do you want us to do with these girls. We've collected them for your taxes. He said let them all off the hook

except that one and he pointed to a girl with these big old knockers. And he says take her to Merlin and see what he says to do... You know, we just interact and the people play right back with us...you just try to talk to people and they take it. Few people get mad at us.

Although this type of interaction may seem regressive in regular social contexts, it evidently reflects the *human instinct of play*. According to Huizinga (1980), play is a fundamental dimension in the life of human being. *Play precedes culture*. For him, therefore, play must be recognized as the *true first premise of human existence*.

#### Qualities of playful human interaction

Social interactions governed by norms and regulations remove the elements of play to a large extent in modern society. The interactive play experience occurring at the festival between the serious visitors and the casual visitors is clearly distinctive from the experiences sought in other institutionalized form of entertainments such as sports games and amusement parks. It tends to maximize the spontaneity and creativity of human interaction which are the core element of play. As some contemporary commentators argue, play often serves something which is not play mainly because fundamental human capability of play through human interaction has been gradually replaced with more artificial and institutionalized form of entertainments in which the typical interactions are between men and machine, computer programmed images, or landscape in a sense. A gradual displacement of human interactions from diverse institutionalized form of leisure activities tends to deprive an authentic joyfulness of play. In contrast, the encounters between the casual visitors and the hard core visitors at the Texas Renaissance Festival are often based on spontaneous and unscripted role playing actions. Jennifer commented:

You pretend like you are that person. Whatever person you wanna be. And it's safe. It's not like somebody is gonna go, "What's got into you, you are crazy". I guess it's like improvisation. That's what makes it a whole lot of fun. You can get into the conversation and try to act in style. See how far it goes. I guess the way it is people are playing. It's like when you are child and you pretend to be a

super hero or something like that. People like to play. It's just built in human instinct to have fun, to play around. You really don't have a whole lot of outlets for that kind of thing. You have amusement parks. But, what do you do when you go there? Just ride a ride and scream loud. Wow! That ride was great. But, that's not human interaction. That's not one person to another. It's not conversation.

Trying to behave as an active actor in simulated situations allows one to suspend the reality, easing him/her of the anxiety and pressures from everyday and work roles. If one acknowledges that play is a fundamental human instinct, it can be reasonably argued that the inter-personal relationships based on a human instinct of play are authentic because they are not governed by institutionalized norms, values, or preprogrammed rules but by their own human instinct. That is, while they are immersed in the role playing, they are truthful to their instinct of play (particularly play with someone else). Hence, the subsequent experiences through such a playful interaction, although it may be momentary, help discover each other as a playful human being free from various social norms, values, and rules of institutionalized impression management (Goffman 1959). In this sense, the role-playing interactions occurring within the festival allow them to experience authentically playful human relationship.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the social world of highly committed visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival in regard to the nature of their involvement and phenomenological experiences during the festival. The general research questions that guided the inquiry included: 1) to what extent does festival goers' participation reflect the characteristics of serious leisure participation, as described by Stebbins (1982; 1992; 2001)?; 2) what are their experiences like during the festival and what meanings do they place on their experiences during the festival? The on-site field research utilizing formal in-depth interviews, casual conversations, and participant observation, was undertaken to address these research questions. The 2-year period of field research has provided some interesting insights into this form of tourism activity.

In regard to the first research question, the results indicated that their continuous participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival displays qualities of serious leisure: 1) identification; 2) long-term career; 3) unique ethos; 4) significant personal effort; 5) perseverance; 6) eight durable benefits. However, the unique qualities that are associated with the festival participation seemed to be more complex than it has been shown in previous studies. It was particularly interesting to notice that the commercially intensive activity (attraction) like the Texas Renaissance Festival could generate a well-integrated subculture that encompasses individuals with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The prominent values that characterize the ethos of the subculture include personal freedom, hedonism, and anti-materialism. Those shared values set them apart from the casual visitors to the festival. For most of the serious visitors, the subculture developed around the medieval themed festivals serve as a forum to facilitate a sense of community that indeed enables the continuous participation in the festival. Hence, whether he/she belongs to a subculture appears to act as the most central factor that explains the nature of serious leisure in the context of the Texas Renaissance Festival.

The in-depth interviews revealed that their experiences during the festival were reminiscent of tourism existential authenticity specified by Wang (1999). The festival experiences were divided into two levels: personal and interpersonal. On a personal level, there were two dimensions that emerged. One is related to the pure pleasure of body. During the festival, particularly at the campground, they seemed to be more open to licentious behaviors and remarks. And some individuals actively seek the sexual experiences that are often casual in nature during the festival. Also, a heavy consumption of alcohol and food by the serious visitors suggests another way to fulfill the bodily pleasures through the festival. Besides the bodily feelings fulfilled, it appears that they use the festival participation as a way to express, regain, or reconstruct their true-self that has been submerged under the work or family roles in everyday life. Several distinctive features (e.g., costuming, the use of festival name, and role-playing interaction) of the festival allow them to actively explore the diverse aspects of his or her identity. Over the years of participation in the festival, they tend to develop a desirable



self-identity mostly built around the subculture. Thus, the festival participation eventually contributes to building one's desirable self-identity that is not easily attainable in everyday life. On an interpersonal level, two dimensions of authentic experience were identified, as perceived by the serious visitors. Firstly, it was found that the visitors tend to experience an unmediated human relationship during the festival. Being in a liminal zone where no physical features that may imply one's social status are present, they tend to confront each other as an equal human being and gain a sense of community. It should be noticed that the perception of such social equality helps enhance their self-esteem as well. Secondly, the role-playing interaction tends to provide them a chance to experience truly playful nature of human interaction that often transcends everyday mundane existence.

The results in this chapter also exemplify some empirical linkage between a feeling of alienation and existential authenticity. Much literature has suggested a theoretical linkage between a sense of alienation and a search for authenticity. Simply speaking, they collectively suggest that individuals who are alienated from modern society search for authentic experiences that are believed to exist somewhere outside their home society. The present study explored the concept of alienation as a state of individual experience specified by Seeman (1959, 1983, 1991). Three types of alienating experiences were prominent among the study participants: social isolation, cultural disengagement, and self-estrangement. From the theoretical standpoint, it is logical to infer that the different types of alienating experience at home environment, as articulated by each individual, are associated with different types of authentic experiences sought particularly through the festival. For example, people who indicate a sense of social isolation in their everyday life would search for a sense of community or bonding experience through the festival while people with a feeling of self-estrangement would be more likely to look for a chance to express their authentic (or true) self. However, such a detailed theoretical linkage was not evidently exemplified in this study, although it seems clear that there exists a close relevance between a sense of alienation and a search of existential authenticity.

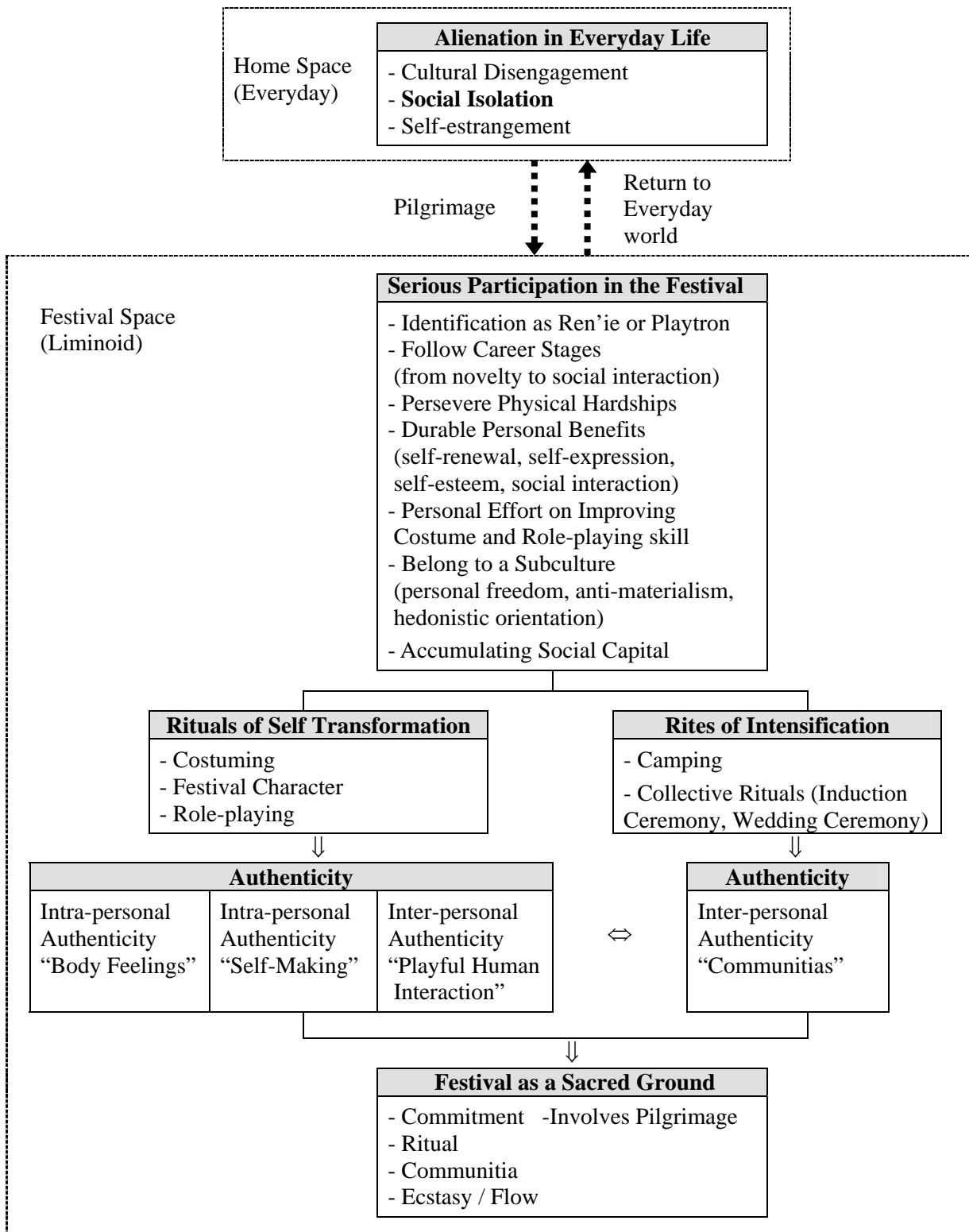
## CHAPTER V

### LINKING THEMES: A GROUNDED THEORY OF THE SERIOUS FESTIVAL TOURIST

The previous chapter described the multiple themes and concepts that emerged prominently from this study. This chapter in conjunction with the previous chapter attempts to show the important picture emerging through the linking of these themes. Following the tenets of grounded theory method (Glaser 1978), this chapter is devoted to bringing into clearer focus a grounded theory of serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival. The serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival explored in this study reflects a complex tourism phenomenon that takes place in response to the larger societal conditions. The results of the study consist of several central themes (alienation, serious leisure and existential authenticity) that are intertwined. The identified themes and their inter-connections are shown in Figure 9. Each theme is discussed below, drawing upon the key dimensions and categories described in chapter IV (also summarized in Figure 9).

#### **Alienation**

The characteristics of modernity include a strong emphasis on rationality, the loss of traditional community, assertion of individualism, and social specialization. Many social commentators often maintain that these traits of modernity generate a sense of alienation in modern individuals and make it an inevitable feature of modern existence. In response, leisure and tourism products have emerged as a medium to release the tension of alienating circumstances (Rojek 1995). Thus, it is not surprising to see that escapism is identified as the most common tourism/leisure motivation (Crompton 1979; Dann 1982; Ryan and Glendon 1998). To escape from everyday reality can be conceived of as an attempt to overcome diverse forms of alienating experiences that are



**Figure 9. Serious Participation in the Renaissance Themed Festival**

deeply embedded in everyday social life. However, the resulting experiences through such an escape attempt can be only momentary or illusionary in nature (Rojek 1995). Then, is there any way that one can transform the momentary or illusionary reality created within leisure/tourism space into a more tangible or possibly permanent reality? One possible answer for this question may be serious leisure. Through serious involvement with a certain leisure or tourism activity, one can transcend the problems and uncertainties of daily life, and one might even be able to transfer the temporary reality back into their everyday life space.

This implies the dynamic conceptual linkage between the alienation and serious leisure participation. The perceived alienation in everyday life appears to be closely connected to serious participation in the festival and authentic experiences sought through the participation. More specifically, *the perceived alienation in everyday life seems to act as an impetus for certain individuals (serious visitors) to participate in the Texas Renaissance Festival in a more serious and ritualistic manner.* This study identified that the perceived feeling of cultural disengagement, social isolation, and self-estrangement (disguised self and despised self) were the prominent alienating experiences for many but not all the participants I interviewed. It appears that the continuous engagement with the festival can be conceived of as an attempt to recuperate or escape from the alienating experiences. In a sense, the Texas Renaissance Festival is a shelter from the alienating circumstances at home environment. However, it should be noticed that attending the festival is not just a simple matter of escaping from the harsh reality of everyday life, but is an active quest for an “alternative” to their lives at home as many indicated. *The Texas Renaissance Festival is one they utilize to attain a higher meaning or order (authentic existence) in their lives. But, it takes serious commitment to obtain this existential authenticity.*

## **Serious Participation in the Festival**

### **Unique qualities of serious festival participation**

The results in Chapter IV show that the six unique qualities of serious leisure Stebbins has identified are applicable to the study of serious leisure in the Texas

Renaissance Festival. Besides these six unique qualities, the study indicates an emergence of another important quality (social capital) that has not been adequately addressed by previous research of serious leisure. The characteristics that determine the nature of serious involvement with the festival studied here are summarized below.

### Identification

There are two levels of identification for the serious visitors to the festival. The first level is associated with the broad categorization of themselves as a distinctive group of sub-culture from the casual visitors who are mostly the day-trippers. They often refer to themselves as “Ren’ies” or “Playtron” while referring the casual visitors as “mundanes”. The second level is related to membership in more immediate social groups. Both levels of identification help them aware of each other as a part of unique leisure community, reinforcing the sense of belonging. Their costumes are a significant aspect of their identification with the pageantry and carnival atmosphere of the Renaissance theme. They are careful to refer to their costumes as garb.

### Career stages

A serious involvement with the festival entails progressive developmental stages. As they develop a long-term career with the festival, their primary motivation to attend the festival tends to move from novelty to social interaction and self-realization. That is, as their festival career progresses, it tends to be characterized by a heightened sense or transcendence into authentic existence.

### Perseverance

The serious participation in the festival often entails physical discomforts and social conflicts particularly with the family members who have not become a part of the leisure community. They often perceive the physical hardships accompanying the practice of costuming as a necessary requirement to be fully immersed in the festival. Being fully dressed in heavy garb and implements in the heat and humidity of Texas in October is an uncomfortable task. The possible family conflicts caused by the

continuous participation in the festival are also subject to careful management over the years.

#### Significant personal effort

A continuous participation in the festival necessarily leads to accumulating certain knowledge and experiences. The long-term interest in the festival participation allows or facilitates one to develop some skills that help them become a part of the festival or enhance their experience during the festival. Costuming practice and role-playing interactions are the prominent domains in which one makes a significant effort, along with extended campground stays and re-visits to the festival every weekend and every year.

#### Durable personal benefits

Why do they become seriously involved with the festival? As commonly found in other serious leisure activities, there are several personal benefits that result from seriously participating in the festival. The most prominent benefits include self-renewal, self-expression, self-esteem, and social interaction.

#### Existence of sub-culture with unique ethos

Serious visitors to the festival become a part of unique sub-culture that entails a set of values and norms. The distinctive values include personal freedom (which is further diversified into liberation from everyday reality and license to some excessive behaviors), hedonistic orientation, anti-materialistic (in this sense, anti-modern) world-view. While emphasizing personal freedom, there also exists a normative regulation that is implicitly shared by the serious visitors. That is, any behavior that might result in encroaching upon other attendees' enjoyment is strictly forbidden.

In addition to the dimensions above, this study shows that the "serious leisure tourists" to festivals like Texas Renaissance Festival have some additional properties or considerations that are particular to this domain. For instance, besides the notion of

social world evolving around the serious leisure pursuit, it is important to consider the notion of social capital.

#### Accumulating social capital

In addition to the six unique qualities presented above, the results in Chapter 4 suggest another quality needs to be considered. One of the prominent characters of the serious visitors studied here is related to the creation of a unique subculture and strong social ties within the groups (given that many of the personal benefits are derived from the various social interactions evolved from the festival). Previous research on various forms of serious leisure has also reported the evolution of a leisure community around the chosen pursuit (Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak 2002; Jones 2000). Some negative societal features such as the fragmentation and the loss of community in recent years direct many researchers' attention to the role of serious leisure as alternative sites of community as also identified in this study. For example, Tomlinson (1993: 7) maintained that "voluntary groups in leisure, often involving high levels of commitment to distinct cultural forms, can be read as a manifestation of the urge for intimate and collective relationships and the assertion of (sometimes expert) status in a threatening, unknown and sometimes impersonal world". Stebbins (2001: 56) also predicted that the only available communal connections would come through serious leisure activities for many individuals who are subject to unemployment or part-time employment in Information Age. The form of serious leisure found in the Texas Renaissance Festival, in this sense, seems to emerge as a consequence of communal relationships developed around the unique subculture and many intimate social circles (accessible through festivals) that are not prevalent in everyday work sphere.

It is argued, therefore, that the attainment of social connections identified in this study can be better understood using the concept of social capital. According to Putnam (2000: 19) who popularized the term in academic discourse, social capital refers to "connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them". Indeed, it was found that norms of trust and

reciprocity are highly present among the study participants at the Texas Renaissance Festival. For instance, many articulated that they trust each other (group members) to the extent that they can leave their children to each other. Also, many reciprocal behaviors were reported. A comment from one informant illustrates this reciprocity present among the hard-core visitors.

...my wife got sick last year and had to have emergency surgery. And so I had to take off from work for a while, and we got a little behind bills and stuff. They brought us food, a bunch of money they collected, which we didn't ask for but they were like "we're gonna help ya'll out." We do it for anybody that's in our group. Cause this group is closer than most families are. We know everything about everybody. Everybody knows if there's a problem, we all work it out.

It is such a sense of trust and reciprocity prevalent among the hard-core visitors that binds them together and fosters continuous involvement with the festival. That is, a communal form of leisure activity such as the festival studied here socially connects individuals with each other to build reciprocal relationships. The linkage between communal leisure activities and the production of social capital has been explicitly suggested in the literature (Hemingway 1999; Glover 2004; Putnam 2000).

The accumulation of social capital is closely related to resulting benefits which can be divided into two levels: macro (societal) level and micro (personal) level (Putnam 2000). The societal and personal benefits are not necessarily mutually exclusive; they are greatly interconnected. The possible benefits of social capital on a societal level include low crime rate, better economic growth, and better integration of community and society as a whole. The personal benefits of social capital may include better health, a sense of belonging, and enhanced self-esteem, which are derived from supportive social interactions (social capital). These benefits show that the existence of social networks is crucial for the well-being of individuals and the society as a whole.

The awareness that communal leisure activities are a forum where the production of social capital takes place directs our attention to the significant role of serious leisure on constructing social networks around the chosen leisure pursuit.



Particularly, as shown above, festival participation as a form of serious leisure involves the development of subcultures with multiple social circles inside. It was noticed from this study that many personal benefits were associated with a particular subculture. The possession of membership to the festival related social circles can be an important criterion to determine whether it be casual or serious leisure. That is, if one is not committed to the on-going social network, he/she does not gain social capital that accrue to the social interactions either. Of course, then, he/she is not likely to obtain personal benefits derived from joining the social circles. For example, some personal benefits such as sense of belonging, social interaction, and enhancement of self-image directly stemmed from the supportive social networks they were associated with. Particularly, it is interesting to notice that enhancement of self-image can be uniquely attributed to the social ties developed within the social circles they belong. Arguably, maintenance of positive self-image is one of the fundamental human desires that act as an underlying force to direct social relationships (Stryker 1980; Thoits 1991). As such, individuals are likely to pursue intimate social relationships that act positively towards their self-image. Conversely, the positive enhancement of self-image is not easily attainable without active endorsement of important others. This indicates that serious leisure pursuits as a generator of social capital (development of positive social networks for the participant) are important for one's personal well-being as well as community or social integration.

Thus, the Texas Renaissance Festival needs to be viewed as a social context in which social capital is produced, accessed, and used by the visitors who are highly committed to the festival. Serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival reflects the modern individuals' urge to find social connections that are characterized through aspects such as trust and reciprocity. The social capital produced through intense and committed festival participation is the catalyst that makes an otherwise casual leisure activity a serious leisure pursuit.

### **Additional insights to serious leisure**

The findings presented in this research show that the social world of highly committed visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival takes a form of serious leisure characterized by six unique qualities plus another emerged quality, an accumulation of social capital. The identification of festival participation as a form of serious leisure provides an important addition to the list of serious leisure activities provided by previous researchers. It also helps better understand the nature of serious leisure versus casual leisure, with respect to knowledge/experience and the concept of hedonism.

### Knowledge of the Serious Participants to the Festival

The Texas Renaissance Festival, as a form of theme park which only opens seven weekends per year, displays several features that appear to be more closely associated with fostering a casual involvement rather than a serious involvement. For example, it does not necessarily require as much skill or knowledge as commonly found in other serious leisure activities such as bridge play (Scott and Godbey 1994), fishing (Yoder 1997), being a football fan (Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak 2002; Johns 2000), historical reenactment (Mittelstaedt 1995). It may be that some features (e.g., costuming and speaking in a period accent) of the Renaissance festival participation resemble that of historical reenactment. However, unlike participants in historical reenactments, not all of the hard-core visitors to this festival are affiliated with this specific time era or historical reenactments. Of course, for some, the Renaissance time era depicted within the festival is a central element that drew them to the festival at the first place. And many of the interviewers indicated that they have a certain level of affinity and nostalgia towards the distant past that broadly encompasses the Renaissance period. However, it seems that the continuous engagement with the festival over a long-term period is not motivated by 'scientific' historical interest but by multiple self-benefits and the social capital developed over the time. That is, the historical knowledge or reenactment skill is not a necessary requirement for individuals to be seriously engaged in the festival. This is not to say that historical knowledge or some special skills related to historical

reenactments are not important at all in determining the characteristics of their involvement with the festival. Some actually showed a strong affinity toward reenacting the historical characters during the festival. Some of the popular performances within the festival also represent a historical reenactment. Figure 10 shows a Jousting show at the Texas Renaissance Festival. However, overall, it seems that the historical reenactment is not the main criterion that determines the nature of serious involvement with the festival studied here. A fantasy character shown in Figure 11 illustrates the less prominent role of scientific history among the serious visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival. Rather, their affiliation with the subculture that emerged from the campground of the festival seems to be the critical element that determines the nature of their involvement with the festival. Understanding the subculture values and norms is the major element that reflects their level of seriousness to the festival participation. That is, it is not factual knowledge but experiential knowledge that characterizes the degree of seriousness for the visitors studied here. This insight suggests that other experiential forms of tourism and leisure activities could be explored in this light, i.e., as an important dimension of serious participation in events like the Texas Renaissance Festival.

#### The paradox of hedonism

The Texas Renaissance Festival is a commercial tourism precinct that falls into the category of a heritage/cultural theme park. The participation in such commercially intensive activity has often been regarded as a form of casual leisure. According to Stebbins (1997b: 18), casual leisure is defined as “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it”. Following the definition, a central property of casual leisure is often equated with hedonism (pleasure and enjoyment) as opposed to enduring satisfaction and rewardingness which usually accompany with pursuing serious leisure.

The involvement with the subculture created within the festival fosters extreme hedonism (immediate pleasure and enjoyment in both bodily and psychological sense).



**Figure 10. A Jousting Performance at the Texas Renaissance Festival**



**Figure 11. A Visitor in a Fantasy Character**

Apparently, this is one of the main motivators for the individuals to be continuously engaged in the festival. This indicates an interesting paradoxical quality of serious festival consumption at least as shown in this study. Stebbins (2001) suggested that serious leisure tends to generate long-lasting satisfaction and a full existence while casual leisure produces only immediate and evanescent pleasure. That is, the hedonic quality is primarily associated with casual leisure although “amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers do find a certain amount of pure fun and pleasure in what they do” (Stebbins 2001b: 54). Thus, it has been postulated that the experience of pure fun and pleasure does not constitute the major part of taking up serious leisure. However, the present study shows that the serious visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival tend to equally value the hedonic experience (e.g., pursuit of pure fun and bodily pleasure) and long-lasting satisfaction (e.g., development of friendship). Both casual and serious leisure elements which appear contradictory to each other are significantly represented in this unique form of festival consumption. It is more accurate to say that individuals in pursuit of immediate pleasure and fun form a social world of like-mindedness. The evolution of such a social world, in turn, provides its members with some significant personal rewards (e.g., gaining a valued identity) as well as social rewards (e.g., a sense of belonging).

The presence of both contradictory qualities in serious festival consumption illustrates that hedonism is not an exclusive quality of casual leisure. Indeed, as described previously, Stebbins (2001b) acknowledged that serious leisure may also be accompanied by a degree of pure fun and pleasure. However, it was found that the role of such hedonic experience in serious leisure is more important, at least within this study of festival participation, than it was previously acknowledged. *There appears to be an intimate relationship between a pursuit of hedonic pleasure and long-lasting satisfaction gained through the festival participation.* That is, a pursuit of pleasure seems to be one of the essential values that bind otherwise distinctive individuals into a unique subculture. A degree of pleasure (which may be fleeting and transitory) seems to be

enhanced through the social rapport naturally evolving with long-term engagement with the festival. A sense of pleasure tends to be amplified in the presence of others who support the idea of having pleasure within the festival. In turn, the belief that they all share a similar value system (personal freedom, anti-materialism, and hedonism) tends to promote a sense of community and we-ness. Therefore, the distinction between casual leisure and serious leisure is not necessarily derived from the nature of the activity, but from the way that the activity is pursued.

### **Existential Authenticity**

Participation in a commercial entertainment such as the Texas Renaissance Festival can include a range of visitor profiles from the casual to the serious. As discussed above, serious leisure in the Texas Renaissance Festival revolves around the social dimension of the activity rather than a concern for objective authenticity. Moreover, serious participation in the festival requires repetitive or cyclical behaviors of the participants (also see pilgrimage later in this chapter). The ritualistic characteristics of serious participation is essential to attaining existential authenticity in the festival.

### **Ritualistic characters of serious participation in the festival**

A serious leisure pursued through the Texas Renaissance Festival tends to be ritualistic as it entails a series of collective actions occurring outside the regular social context (liminoid zone). Two general classes of secular ritual (rituals of transformation and rites of intensification) are closely associated with the serious consumption of the festival studied here. The ritual practices engaged in during the festival generate an opportunity to achieve a state of existential authenticity. Each ritual is closely associated with a different type of existential authenticity. Using Wang's (1999) specification, the attainment of intra-personal authentic experiences becomes possible through rituals of transformation while the achievement of inter-personal authentic experiences comes through rituals of intensification.

### Rituals of self-transformation

Serious participation in the festival involves rituals of self-transformation (Goffman 1963). Most notably, costuming, which is a necessary element of serious participation in the festival, provides a liberating opportunity for temporary identity transformation (Belk and Costa 1998). Widely acknowledged in the anthropology literature, costuming serves to display a transformed identity particularly within festivals and special ritual occasions (Abraham 1982; Ortner 1978). In other words, costuming is a symbolic means to transcend the wearer's socially constructed identity (Halpin 1979). The use of festival character names also helps create a new identity. Given that a name is a fundamental identity symbol, using a character name during the festival has a significant effect on transforming one's identity. The use of festival name and costuming practice become powerful in transforming one's identity, particularly through role-playing interactions that necessarily entail a "theater effect" (Pollock 1995). It suggests that costuming signals to both wearer and audience the disguise of identity and the appearance of transformed identity. The interactions based on such implicit agreement constantly affirm one's newly created identity, and consequently reinforce the transformed identity during the festival. These elements of serious participation (e.g., the use of festival name, costuming, and role-playing interactions) help them to temporarily suspend their everyday identity and assume a festival identity.

The consequences of this temporary identity transformation seem to be powerful for most of the serious visitors in constructing their experiences during the festival. Crocker (1982: 81) notes that: "The concealment of identity seems almost to generate challenges to culture's rules about law, order, and etiquette." By disguising and transforming their identity, serious visitors attain a temporary liberation from various social norms, regulations, and obligations that are incumbent upon everyday self. The prevalence of licentious behaviors and excessive alcohol consumption may be owing to this temporary transformation (or disguise) of one's identity. It can be argued that the disguise of identity at the festival provides them a temporary license to seek various bodily feelings that are not easily attainable in everyday life. These rituals of self-

transformation reflect the character of ritual reversal where meanings and rules of ordinary behavior are changed or reversed (Leach 1961; Turner 1969). By changing or reversing some rules of ordinary behavior, they are able to fulfill some bodily impulses. Consequently, it can be said that rituals of self-transformation (or ritual reversal) in the festival allow serious visitors to attain a different set of authentic bodily feelings.

The identity transformation activities also affect one's perceptions. The fantasy characters chosen for the festival often reflect one's desired or hidden self. They select some desired or hidden attributes of self and incorporate these elements into their assumed characters. Thus, the characters they play at the festival should be conceived of as an aspect of self not successfully expressed in everyday social contexts. By playing out such characters in public, they amplify the desired self-images and gradually incorporate them into their everyday self-images. Some elements of festival personae are also transferred to these everyday contexts for participants. Some participants act differently in their everyday life due to the transformed self-perception over the years of experience at the festival. That is, as they become more involved with the festival, they tend to adopt the festival identity to such an extent that it pervades self-definition. Hence, the participation and playing out of assumed costumed characters at the festival can be best understood as a process of self-making or self-discovery.

### Rites of intensification

Serious participation in the festival also exemplifies rites of intensification. Weibel-Orlando (1991: 142) defines rites of intensification as "a regularly practiced community ritual that exemplifies core community values and ideal in-group behavior...allows individuals to express, in a public arena, their membership in a larger human corpus that shares and endorses certain cultural activities and perspectives". Chapple and Coon (1942), on the other hand, regard "rites of intensification" as the periodic or cyclical rites which renew the social and natural world, usually in an annual cycle. Apart from "rites of passage" which are non-periodic rituals, "rites of intensification" indicate the rituals repeatedly practiced. These perspectives suggest two



core elements that determine rites of intensification: repetitive/cyclical nature of events and group-centered rituals. The serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival includes both elements, thus should be considered as rites of intensification. First, serious visitors attend the festival (which takes place annually for seven weekends) on a regular basis. Second, it was found that the long-term engagement with the festival has generated a subculture in which individuals with diverse social backgrounds are gathered around the shared core values (e.g., personal freedom, hedonism, and anti-materialism) and norms. The subculture (that may pervades their everyday life) seems to serve as a major source for generating a sense of community. Over the festival period, they confirm the temporary ritual establishment of community cohesion through a variety of collective actions. These collective actions encompass induction ceremony for the new membership, wedding ceremony, role-playing games, and seemingly deviant drinking or flagging practices. Particularly, these actions serve to reinforce their identity in contrast to casual visitors. This in-group and out-group distinction may be a fundamental requirement to establish a virtual membership and a sense of belonging. More significantly, the collective actions occurring within the liminal space of festival allow them to experience a state of *communitas* that transcends typical social norms and conventions (Turner and Turner 1978). *The shared ritual experiences at the festival increase the emotional intensity of links among participants dissimilar in ordinary life.* Consequently, the intensified bonding experience that often goes beyond ordinary camaraderie allows them to establish and affirm the *authenticity of human relationships* prevalent in this festival.

The serious consumption of festival experience explored in this study thus represents the way contemporary individuals attain existential authenticity through a tourism practice. The carnivalesque fantasy world created within the Texas Renaissance Festival (e.g., the tourism enclave) provides a temporary escape from everyday reality and helps them gain various alternative experiences for a short period of time. As they become more involved with the festival and visits to the festival become more ritualistic, the temporal touristic reality becomes solid enough to become transferred to a permanent

social reality. Thus, serious participation in this medieval themed festival can be interpreted as an *attempt to construct the ideal community where authentic self and sincere form of unmediated human relationships are obtainable through a series of ritualistic actions*. The two classes of rituals (rituals of self-transformation and rites of intensification) identified here suggest that the Texas Renaissance Festival is a space in which intra and interpersonal authenticity mutually reinforce each other to enable a state of existential authenticity for serious participants. A cyclical travel to the Texas Renaissance Festival, thus, can be interpreted as a form of pilgrimage that may have an enduring effect on one's life in the festival space. As described further below, these effects also translate to the everyday life of the participant (in the non-touristic or home space).

### **Linkage between intrapersonal and interpersonal authenticity**

A prominent conceptual issue that emerges from this study in regard to the existential authenticity is about the linkage between intrapersonal and interpersonal authenticity. It should be noted that the linkage between intra and interpersonal authenticity was not fully explored in Wang's (1999) discussion of existential authenticity. This study contributes to clarifying the conceptual linkage. The theory of sense of community (McMillan 1996) appears to be helpful in understanding the implicit association between intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal authenticity, as it pertains to the development of bonding relationships among the individuals of similarity. According to this theory, people seek a social setting where they can experience essential dynamic of community and feel safe from shame. But, one is not likely to experience a sense of community (analogous to touristic *communitas*) without expressing one's true-feeling (he referred to this as "The Truth") to others within the group. This indicates a significant association between intrapersonal authentic experience and interpersonal authentic experience. It can be postulated that intrapersonal authenticity (expression of true-self) and interpersonal authenticity (a true

sense of we-ness) are mutually reinforcing in the Texas Renaissance Festival, where self and social world are intricately intertwined.

The development of subculture within the festival appears to be a crucial condition for them to induce both intrapersonal and interpersonal authentic experiences. According to McMillan (1996: 321), “if one can find people with similar ways of looking, feeling, thinking, and being, then it is assumed that one has found a place where one can safely be oneself”. This statement suggests that expression of true (or authentic) self can take place only within a safe social environment. The word “safe” here pertains to the idea of acceptance. If one feels that he/she is being accepted, then one may feel the social environment is safe for him/herself. This is because individuals attempt to avoid shame that may result from the expression of true self in front of others. The underlying idea is that one is not likely to drop his/her social roles and accompanying impression management strategy (Goffman 1959) unless he/she is absolutely certain that others will accept his/her true self. The role of intimate social circles is essential in promoting the safe and accepting atmosphere for one to reveal his/her true self. As argued, a search of social setting where one can be true to him/herself without shame or embarrassment is an essential dynamic of subculture development. Individuals seek those with whom they share similar traits so as to preserve one’s self-hood amidst social relations. This is, as McMillan (1996) contends, the driving force behind the development of voluntary social groups. In turn, the evolvement of subculture can be attributed to one’s quest for true self or true human relationships. Consequently, it can be argued that a unique subculture developed within the hard-core visitors at the Texas Renaissance Festival acts as a safe ground for them to express true self and authentic relationship. As such, it raises the possibility that travel to the Texas Renaissance Festival is a form of pilgrimage to a “sacred ground”.

### **Festival Participation as a Pilgrimage to a Sacred Ground?**

Tourism can be viewed as a secular ritual which may involve the quality of pilgrimage and sacredness. For example, Graburn (1989) proposed the idea that tourism

is comparable to a sacred journey; people leave their profane realm of everyday life, progress to a state of heightened aestheticization, and return to ordinary. Cohen (1979) also suggests that people who do not have a spiritual Center at home society seek such a Center through touring. That is, for those who do not have the Center at home, tourism is not just a form of recreation but a sacred journey to search for “transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and sacred” (Turner 1969: 138).

Similarly, the Texas Renaissance Festival may be characterized as a sacred ground for the serious leisure visitors, where authentic self and unmediated authentic human relationships are more easily attainable than in everyday life. Serious participation in the festival, as examined through this study, involves emotional/behavioral commitment, ritualistic actions, a state of *communitas*, and *ecstasy/flow* among others. These are among the central properties of the sacred (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). These are the qualities that contribute to understanding the festival as a sacred ground for the serious visitors, despite the paradox of hedonism, play and personal pleasure that clearly make their festival experience and existence.

### **Commitment**

The sacred induces both individual and collective commitment. From the psychological perspective, individuals are emotionally attached to that which is considered sacred. It was found that the serious visitors identified in this study make a significant long-term commitment to the festival; such commitment is manifested in repeat visitation to Texas Renaissance Festival and other similar medieval themed festivals, monetary investment in costuming, and a sense of pride associated with the festival and the campground. The commitment that the sacred is likely to induce, in turn, helps one build an identity around it. Hence, the sacred serves as a strong part of one’s identity. For the serious visitors, the Texas Renaissance Festival acts as a sacred ground that provides a major source for constructing their identity. A shared commitment, on the other hand, helps build an alternative social order within the sacred.

The subculture developed from the Texas Renaissance Festival reflects a shared commitment by the serious visitors, which eventually leads to building a self-identity and an alternative social order to everyday life.

### **Ritual**

A ritual “prepares one to approach the sacred and may be enacted as an individual or, more commonly, as a group” (Belk et al 1989: 7). It becomes an effective element to create the sacredness by separating the profane from the sacred. As discussed in the previous section, the serious participation in the festival involves a series of individual and group rituals (e.g., costuming practice, wedding ceremony, induction ceremony, role-playing). The group rituals among the serious visitors serve to reinforce their membership to the subculture of the festival, separating them from the casual visitors. For example, the induction ceremony (that celebrates a new membership in the group) contributes to reinforcing the sacredness of the festival participation. To be inducted into a social group within the festival, people tend to undergo a year of squireship that in turn serves to screen out the less committed visitors (casual visitors or “mundanes”) from the serious visitors. Analogously, it serves to protect the sacred from the profane. On the other hand, the individual rituals such as costuming practice and role-playing serve to visually distinguish them from the casual visitors, which eventually helps maintain the boundary of the sacred from the profane. When the serious visitors attend the festival without costuming, they will be labeled as “naked” and will be harassed in a rather humorous way by other serious visitors. This implies that the individual ritual like costuming becomes an essential strategy to maintain the sacredness of festival spaces and experience.

### **Communitas**

The sacred inspires a state of *communitas* among the participants. A state of *communitas* is a blend of “lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship in which boundaries between participants disappear as they share a status “betwixt and

between” their previous and future statuses” (Turner 1969: 96). It is a shared feeling that frees participants from their normal social roles and statuses and instead engages them in a transcending camaraderie of status equality. This extraordinary communal feeling has been identified earlier as an important dimension of interpersonal authenticity for the serious visitors to the festival. The spirit of *communitas* stemming from the shared ritual experiences “transcends those of status-striving, money-grubbing, and self serving” (Turner 1972: 391). At the festival, engagement in a series of ritualistic practices such as costuming, role-playing, and camping helps them to confront and accept each other as an equal human being not bounded by normative social attributes.

### **Ecstasy/flow**

The sacred has a capability of generating something similar to ecstatic or flow experience, in which one stands outside one’s self. The experience of ecstasy or flow marks the extraordinary character of sacred experience and distinguishes it from the common pleasures of everyday life. That is, it is a pure pleasure that arises from the transcendent reality of sacred things. While a state of *communitas* indicates a group phenomenon, ecstasy/flow is associated with individual experience. The serious visitors studied here indicate that they undergo a variety of self-transcending experiences (intrapersonal authenticity) at the festival. The self-transformation rituals (e.g., costuming practice, festival name, and role-playing) and licentious behaviors (e.g., excessive drinking and food consumption and nudity) that they are engaged in during the festival help produce an extreme level of liberating experience in both bodily and psychological sense. It is a feeling of liberation from their everyday (profane) existence. The self-transcendent feeling being induced at the festival eventually helps mark the festival as a sacred ground for the serious visitor.

Serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival, therefore, involves several traits that characterize the sacred as opposed to the profane (ordinary and mundane). Such traits include commitment, ritual, *communitas* (interpersonal

authenticity), and ecstasy/flow (intrapersonal authenticity) experience. These elements separate serious visitors and their experiences from the world of the profane and imbue them with precious, positive sacredness. That is, the character of serious participation in the festival serves to maintain a sacred status and prevent the encroachment of the profane. In this sense, traveling to the festival can be perceived as a pilgrimage.

According to Turner and Turner (1978), pilgrimage entails the movement of people from their everyday world of structured roles and statuses to a sacred center which indicates a world of *communitas* or anti-structure. Thus, it seems to be reasonable to suggest that serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival involves a pilgrimage to a sacred ground where people attain a sense of authentic self and authentic interpersonal relationship. The fact that travel to the festival is repetitive and committed as a regular event adds further to the notion of pilgrimage and the sacred.

However, this does not mean that there is no linkage between everyday world and the festival world. This study shows that there is a interconnection between everyday world and festival world (some might describe as the profane and the sacred) through the embodied acts of the participant. This interconnectedness is discussed below for it has important implications for authentic experience in both the touristic space and their space of daily life.

### **Linkage between Home Space and Festival Space**

This study shows that two important aspects need to be elaborated upon with regard to the two spaces of festival life and everyday life. First, festival-related embodied practices (e.g., monthly gathering, mending costumes and accessories) occurring in everyday life link the two spaces. Secondly, a sense of alienation in everyday life may possibly decrease as a consequence of continuous engagement in the festival. The convergence through embodied practices between home space and tourism (festival) space is well articulated in Jamal and Hill's contention (2002: 98-99): "Repeat visits allow the visitor to engage in deeper searches for authenticity since there is past experience (familiarity) to organize new experiences cognitively and emotionally...As

the world becomes more familiar through both travel and other previously identified factors, it is encompassed into 'home' so that authentic experiences are not something exclusive of authentic everyday existence". This implies that serious commitment to tourism space not only helps one to attain authentic experience but also converges two otherwise separate spaces into a more interconnected space. The serious visitors to the Texas Renaissance Festival, as discussed earlier, are likely to obtain authentic experiences through the consistent participation in the festival and the subculture evolved from it. The effects of authentic experiences gained through the festival participation does not just remain in the festival space but are extended into their everyday life. Mark, the one who attended the Texas Renaissance Festival over five years, illustrates the enduring effect of festival experience by commenting: "I've gotten a lot more open, I'm not as shy as I used to be and I've got a whole lot more positive self-impression....I'd have to say this (festival participation) has changed my whole life and I guess it's just allowed me to be the person that was inside me I just couldn't see before". This is a rather common response regarding the effect of festival participation in their everyday existence (e.g., self-identity). Also, the extended social network developed from the festival exerts a direct impact on their everyday social life. Various alienating experiences (social isolation and self-estrangement) in their everyday life seem to be diminishing due to the increased social capital. However, these illustrations are not to suggest that experiences at the festival and the everyday space eventually become merged together. There still exists a distinctive difference between festival space and everyday space in terms of the intensity of experience because of liminal characteristics (e.g., temporary suspension of social norms) of festival space. The current contention is to emphasize that the existence of festival life significantly affects the existence of everyday life because experience and activities are fundamentally embodied practices.

Therefore, it is suggested, as shown in Figure 7, that the study of serious participation in tourism spaces like the Texas Renaissance Festival has to consider the relationship between home space (everyday) and the festival space (liminoid), and that these two spaces are interrelated rather than mutually exclusive.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the Texas Renaissance Festival, as perceived and experienced by visitors whom this was a form of regular, repeated and highly meaningful participation. Specifically, the focus was to gain understanding of the notion of serious leisure as defined by Stebbins, in the context of the festivals, and understand the meanings associated with festival participation. A qualitative inquiry was implemented to manifest the research problems. The research spanned three years: the first year for a pilot study and the second year dedicated to the main study, followed by extensive and detailed analysis and write-up in the third year. Performing the pilot study entailed several preparatory visits to the festival, a series of interviews with the marketing personnel and highly committed visitors, and some participant observations. The framework for the main study was modified based on the results from this pilot study. The data collection methods for the main study involved participant observation and 37 in-depth interviews. The collected data were analyzed through Grounded Theory techniques specified by Glaser (1978).

There are several key findings derived from this study. Several distinctive elements were identified from the results of this study that separate serious visitors from casual visitors at the Texas Renaissance Festival. First of all, the high level of time and monetary commitment to the Texas Renaissance Festival (as well as other similar festivals) is a most distinctive factor that defines the character of serious visitors. Second, serious visitors tend to identify themselves as a part of a distinctive group often referred to as “Ren’ ies” or “Playtron” while referring to casual visitors as “Mundanes”. Third, serious visitors tend to go through various stages of their festival career as they committed to the festival. Fourth, serious visitors belong to the loosely bounded subculture of the festival in which they share a set of values: personal freedom, hedonism, and anti-materialism. Also, they belong to social groups that have evolved from the festival. Involvement in such social groups not only affects their experiences at

the festival, but also their everyday life experiences as the social relationships evolve into the realm of everyday life. The social interactions occurring between the serious visitors can be characterized as a rite of intensification that functions to enhance the group solidarity. Fifth, serious visitors tend to go through a series of self-transformation rituals. A costuming practice, the use of festival names, and various role-playing interactions allow them to transcend their everyday existence and become a different person, at least for the duration of the festival.

When all the above aspects are examined from such an interpretive and meaning-based approach, it can be argued that the phenomenological experiences of the serious visitors reflect an important quest for an alternative state of being. It was interpreted through this study that continuous participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival and other similar tourism attractions has been driven by a fundamental human need, namely existential authenticity as described by Wang (1999). On a personal level, participation in the festival is an attempt to regain one's real self by fulfilling sensuous desires and constructing a desired self-identity. Viewed from an interpersonal level, their experiences at the festival can be characterized as a state of *communitas* and playful (ludic) inter-subjectivity. That is, the social interactions taking place at the festival are based on an atmosphere of equality, acceptance, and playfulness.

The results derived from this study have generated several significant theoretical revelations that will help guide future research on other tourism and leisure phenomena. These are summarized below in the form of propositions derived from the study results, followed by management and marketing implications, and directions for future research.

### **Theoretical Revelations**

#### **Serious visitors and tourism existential authenticity**

During the process of this study, it was identified that there is a segment of individuals whose participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival is a form of serious leisure. One of the most distinctive characters of serious visitors is related to repeat visitation to the festival to continue to maintain an association with other serious visitors

and engage in familiar activities. This extreme case of repetitive actions appears to repudiate the conventional emphasis on novelty as a central element of tourism motive (Lee and Crompton 1992). Of course, this is not to suggest that the different and unusual qualities of a tourism attraction play a less significant role as a tourism motivator, but to suggest that repeat tourism also constitutes a significant portion of overall tourism phenomena. Franklin (2003: 57) speculated that the occurrence of repeat tourism is due to such factors as sentimentality, familiarity, and the need for relaxing time. While those factors may be reasons for repeat tourism, the present study indicates that existential authenticity is an important element that underlines the repeat tourism phenomenon. It was found that the various dimensions of existential authenticity characterize the experiences of serious visitors at the festival. These results suggest that there is a reciprocal relationship between the repeat visitation and existential authenticity. First, the experience of existential authenticity may drive one to re-visit the tourism space in anticipation of recapturing extraordinary experiences that transcend their everyday life experiences. This does not necessarily contradict Franklin's (2003) points, but provides additional insight into the issue of repeat tourism. That is, the existential authenticity is quality attained through embedded participation in this touristic space, which enables an alterity. This leads us to the first proposition addressing the relationship between the experience of existential authenticity and repeat visitation.

**Proposition 1: The attainment of existential authenticity, comprised of the authentic self and authentic inter-subjectivity, is a likely motivator for one to repeatedly participate in contemporary-medieval festivals like the Texas Renaissance Festival.**

Second, there also exists a reciprocal relationship between the level of serious involvement and the experience of existential authenticity. As shown in this study, the relationship between serious involvement with the festival and existential authenticity needs to be understood as an eclectic process. As one becomes more deeply involved with the festival, he/she is likely to have more chance to experience an authentic self and authentic inter-subjectivity. In turn, the attainment of such extraordinary or transcending experiences drives him/her to greater commitment in festival participation.

**Proposition 2: There is a positive association between one's level of involvement with the Texas Renaissance Festival (or other similar tourism attractions) and the attainment of alternative state of being, namely existential authenticity as described by Wang (1999).**

### **Intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal authenticity**

We enjoy the people we camp with, the friends we've met here. They're more honest, they're more themselves than out in the regular world. They come out here and they're themselves mostly, really. They act more like themselves, instead of putting on a show at work. At work, you've got to keep a straight line, things like that to keep your job. When you come out here, you're yourself. (Aarie 57)

As shown in this study, there appears to be a close linkage between the fulfillment of "real self" (intra-personal authenticity) and the experience of interpersonal authenticity. An individual is likely to engage in actions that may help attain one's hidden (or oppressed) desires and desired self-image only when one is certain that such actions will be socially approved by others. According to social psychology literature, the positive affirmation of identity by significant others can lead to enhancement of self-esteem and positive emotional feelings (Burke 1991; Hoelter 1983). This implies that social approval is an essential requirement for one to realize his/her desired self-image because one's self image is constructed only through significant others' acceptance and validation of the image. Ryan (2002: 37) stated that "we know who we are not solely in terms of a sense of personal integrity but in comparison with others, and in the way in which others regard us (or as we perceive and value that evaluation)". Accepting individual distinctiveness is one important element that contributes to a sense of tourism *communitas* (interpersonal authenticity). That is, a state of *communitas* necessarily provides a forum where one is permitted to express true self with the great acceptance.

A theory of sense of community also contributes to understanding the linkage between authentic self and authentic inter-subjectivity. According to McMillan (1996), one expresses his/her true self only when he/she feels a true sense of community in order

to avoid any possible social disapproval of such expressed self. Put differently, if one does not feel true to him/herself, he/she is not likely to achieve a sense of community from the given social interactions.

In sum, there is an interdependent or mutually supportive relationship between the attainment of the authentic self and the authentic relationships with others, in the participating space of the Texas Renaissance Festival. It is an embodied relationship, and the connection between intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal authenticity. Authenticity has been shown to be explicitly linked in this embodied way. It can be argued that the notion of existential authenticity as determined by Wang (1999) needs to better reflect these interconnected relationships.

**Proposition 3: There is a mutually reinforcing and intimate connection between the experience of intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal authenticity, which occurs through embodied participation in the activities at the festival.**

### **Visitor spectrum ranging from casual visitors to serious visitors**

Although the focus of this study was on a specific segment of visitors (serious visitors), there seems to be a spectrum of visitors in terms of their connection to this unique form of tourism attraction. Particularly, in terms of group identity, serious visitors are likely to categorize themselves as Ren'ies or Playtrons. As shown in this study, they are highly committed to the festival and lead a distinctive touristic lifestyle in conjunction with the subculture created through the festival. While serious visitors can be placed on the one end of visitor spectrum, most of the day trippers can be placed on the other end of the spectrum. Most of the day-trippers are visibly distinct from serious visitors because they typically do not follow costuming practice. Also, they do not become a part of the subculture evolved through the festival and rarely visit other similar festivals. In sum, it is reasonable to infer that they enjoy the festival experience as a form of casual leisure. Hence, they may be categorized as casual visitors as opposed to serious visitors. Casual visitors are often denigrated as “mundanes” by serious visitors.

While these two types (casual and serious) occupy polar ends of the visitor spectrum at the festival, there is also an interim level of visitors in terms of their

connectedness to the festival and subculture. They usually follow costuming practices when attending the festival and may engage in some role-playing actions with other casual visitors. That is, participation in costuming practices instantly places them above the level of casual visitors as it makes them visibly distinctive from the casual ones, changes their behaviors to some extent, and consequently shapes their experiences at the festival in a different way. However, they are also different from serious visitors in that they rarely participate in the subculture of the festival that constitutes a distinctive element of serious participation. Hence, their experience would be significantly different from that of serious visitors.

The identification of such distinctive visitors with different levels of involvement with the festival suggests (already alluded in the use of term 'spectrum') that visitor types are best understood as a continuum that may evolve. That is, it is reasonable to assume that one's festival career gradually evolves from a casual level to a higher level. This is, of course, not to suggest that every visitor to the festival is likely to join in the career developing process. Some obviously do not develop their festival career into a higher (more serious) phase but stay at the casual level.

**Proposition 4: The festival career is likely to evolve from the casual level to a higher level, eventually leading to a serious level. The festival experiences are likely to vary along the different developing stages as each stage entails different elements of participating in the festival.**

### **Continuity between tourism experiences and everyday experiences**

Franklin (2003) criticized tourism scholars as attempting to artificially separate the domain of tourism experience and everyday life experience, as if human experiences have a quality of discontinuity. In line with his contention, it is advocated, based on the results of this study, that tourism experiences and everyday experiences are not necessarily separated but intermingled. The effect of festival experiences on everyday life experiences seems to be immense, particularly from both personal and social levels.

In regard to the personal level, there is a creation of self-identity that sometimes crosses over from the festival to everyday life. Many serious visitors at the festival are

engaged in the rituals of self-transformation such as costuming, using a festival name, and subsequent role-playing. Such rituals enable them to drop their everyday self and adopt a new identity (a self-image they would like to portray). The constructed identity, however, is not a total disengagement from every self. One is likely to adopt a certain desired attribute of self and amplify that attribute to the extent that it becomes a central element that represents one's real self. That is, most of them claim that their festival identity is indeed based on a hidden attribute that has been placed underneath their everyday self. This is the typical mechanism that helps construct a desired self-identity at the festival. This constructed identity does not always remain within the festival space and time. Interestingly, many transfer such a constructed (or discovered) self-identity or personality into the real world, although the process is more likely to be gradual than abrupt. As they participate in the festival more often and assume the festival personae more frequently, the chances that the festival identity is transferred to the real world increase. Therefore, the interconnection between tourism identity and everyday identity for serious visitors becomes more intimate. The distinction between everyday self and authentic self constructed (or discovered) through the tourism practice becomes more blurred.

From the social level, the extended social network from the festival to everyday life exemplifies the blurry boundary between tourism experience and everyday experience. It was noticed throughout this study that festival visitors actively introduce their friends and family members to the festival as they become more deeply involved with the festival, thereby strengthening the linkage between the festival and everyday life. It was also noticed that some actively recruit friends from the festival to their place at work. Thus, even at work, they can share and reinforce the memory of the extraordinary experiences they had at the festival. In addition, many serious visitors tend to maintain intimate relationships with each other even in their everyday life through diverse social gatherings and personal contacts. For instance, many participate in a monthly gathering at some local pub, wearing their character costumes in anticipation of recapturing past festival experiences and reinforcing their social

connections with each other. This suggests that the authentic social experiences taking place within this tourism enclave (Texas Renaissance Festival) are intertwined with their everyday life.

It seems reasonable to suggest that tourism experiences are not completely detached from the everyday experiences particularly for repeat tourism practices. That is, as a tourist repeatedly visits the same destination or continuously engages in a similar tourism practice, tourism experiences contribute to shaping his/her everyday experiences to a great extent.

**Proposition 5: The influence of serious festival participation is manifested at the personal and social level in both the touristic (festival) space and the space of everyday life. The degree of influence will be positively associated with participant's level of commitment to the given tourism practice.**

A popular thesis that alienated individuals strive to acquire authentic experiences through a tourism practice (McCannell 1976; Wang 1999) exemplifies the artificial division of two distinctive experiences. The results of this study suggests that there is some linkage between the alienating experiences in everyday life and authentic experiences achieved in a tourism space. That is, for many serious visitors, their everyday life is teemed with alienating experience while the festival is filled with authentic experience. However, as shown in the this study, not all the informants expressed their everyday life as alienated. Some indicated that their everyday life used to be filled with alienating experiences until they seriously committed to the festival. It appears that alienating experiences at home were alleviated by continuous or regular festival participation.

**Proposition 6: There may be two categories of serious visitors at the festival in terms of alienation and authentic experiences. One is individuals who are alienated in everyday life but are happy at the festival. The other is individuals who used to be alienated in everyday life but are gradually overcoming these experiences through the accumulated benefits of the festival.**



### **Management and Marketing Implications**

There are several marketing implications that may be derived from this study. Although some implications are relatively more explicit than others, all are related to ways of adequately fostering and managing a subculture, which eventually contributes to the long-term viability of the attraction.

The long-term viability of a regional tourism attraction rests on the repeat visitors to a great extent because they play a significant role in promoting the attraction to other people in the region. The case of the Texas Renaissance Festival exemplifies the regional tourism attraction based on the Houston Metropolitan Area, given the fact that more than 60% of visitors are from Houston and adjacent cities. Also, the majority of visitors were found to be revisiting the festival; 76% of total visitors were identified as repeat visitors in a 2003 visitor exit survey. Among such a large portion of repeat visitors, the prosperity of this medieval themed commercial attraction seems to largely rely on the segment of highly committed visitors that were studied here. There are several reasons that such a segment of “serious” visitors are of great concern for the festival. First, they constitute a significant portion of repeat visitors to the festival, although there is no exact statistical data on the proportion of such segment of visitors. Second, they act as informal marketers of the festival by simply talking about the festival and often inducing their friends and family to attend over the course of their own long-term participation to the festival. Third, as identified through this study, they act as a living attraction of the festival by donning a costume and interacting with other casual visitors. For the casual visitors, the costumed people as live entertainment may be the most significant factor that shapes a large part of their experience during the festival. That is, they help create the atmosphere of the Renaissance or Medieval period because of the unique period costumes they wear and the course of actions they undertake during the festival. Hence, for a festival of this type, the presence of such serious visitors is likely to enhance the overall attractiveness of the festival. Indeed, several informants of this study indicated that some newly launched medieval festivals have already taken

notice of importance of such individuals and have attempted to entice them to their festivals.

It is apparent that festival marketers can benefit from fostering the evolvement of a subculture and serving its needs. Hence, marketers may need to provide necessary objects or places for the functioning of the subculture. It was found from this study that the availability of a campground for the visitors seems to be crucial for the evolution of a subculture that has originated from medieval themed festivals. The presence of campgrounds provide people with a place to stay overnight, which is one of the essential factors that differentiate casual visitors from serious visitors. As they stay overnight, they obtain a chance to interact with each other based on a common interest, which is the fundamental step for the development of any type of social world. At the campground, they identify with each other, share information, and most importantly indulge in the fundamental human instinct to play. Of course, the festival itself can be utilized as a socializing space. But, the evolution of intimate relationships would be less likely to occur within the festival because of limited time and the large number of people in attendance. In comparison, a campground may offer adequate time and space for people of similar interest to the festival to initialize rather intimate group activities and eventually to develop a unique subculture around the festival. In this sense, the campground becomes an essential element that may generate a subculture of serious visitors as identified here. However, not all festivals of this type provide a campground for visitors. Many informants stated that it is hard to build an intimate social connection with others at festivals with no campground. That is, the development of intimate social circles (which is the core element of serious leisure) is less likely to occur with the absence of a socializing space, such as the campground. Therefore, it is advisable that the festivals or other tourism attractions that draw a significant portion of repeat visitors include a special place such as the campground for these individuals to interact with each other. The ultimate goal of building such social space is to facilitate the interactions between repeat visitors of similar interest and eventually lead them to develop a culture of commitment to the festival. To this end, it is deemed to be desirable

that the marketers consider other methods of facilitating interconnections between festival visitors.

In addition to providing a necessary place for the evolution of this subculture, marketers may also assist in the socialization of new members, facilitate communications within the subculture, and sponsor events that provide sanctuary for the activities of the subculture. For example, many casual visitors who have been involved with the festival over several years were not aware of either the availability of the campground or the existence of the subculture. Thus, marketers may consider actively promoting these elements to the general public. Also, there are numerous social events taking place in and out of the festival and the campground. Sponsoring such events may be utilized as a part of marketing promotions to induce casual visitors into the realm of this subculture. All these efforts may lead to accruing increased visitor loyalty, publicity, and visitor feedback, among other benefits. However, a warning should be given regarding whether they make a marginal subculture more accessible to mainstream visitors, thus increasing the size of this subculture market. Overgrowth of a subculture market may increase the risk of alienating hard-core members, corrupting the subculture, and diluting its original attractiveness.

Another implication is related to the change of motivation to participate in the festival over time. As most of the study participants indicated, the experience of interpersonal authenticity is one of the most crucial aspects that affects their festival participation. This resonates with Wang (2000: 71)'s assertion that existential authenticity is indeed an implicit selling point of the products of tourism. The Texas Renaissance Festival, as a type of medieval themed festival, displays many unique and historic features upon which visitors gaze for enjoyment. Those tangible features such as Renaissance style buildings, jousting, and diverse entertainment performances act as an attraction to draw people to the festival in the first place. However, as their festival career progresses, they tend to perceive the festival not just as a unique attraction but as a forum where they reinforce a sense of belonging through group interaction. This intangible quality of human interaction seems to play a central role among the visitors

with a long-term career with the festival. The idea of evolving tourism motivation is not a novel theme unique to this festival; a similar idea can be found in the concept of the travel career ladder (Pearce 1988; Ryan 1998). That is, the novelty appears to be the primary motivation among the first time visitors. With prolonged engagement with the festival, visitors tend to shift their primary interest from the novelty to the enhancement of interpersonal relationships. Currently, there is extensive literature regarding festival motivation. However, the existing festival literature has overlooked the evolving nature of festival motivations despite their significant impact on festival or special event management strategy. Practitioners in festivals or special events need to consider the change of visitor motivation as it tends to progress with the advancement of festival career. As the motivation is likely to move from novelty to interpersonal relationships, it is desirable that festival products and marketing strategies should also be tailored to this changing motivation.

The theme of the festival is closely associated with visitor characteristics as the theme is often a salient factor that appeals to a certain segment of market. The case of the Texas Renaissance Festival also illustrates this association. Given the size of this festival (about 300,000 visitors over seven weekends) and the nature of the festival as a popular theme park, it is not surprising to see that there are a wide variety of visitors in terms of their ethnic backgrounds, particularly among the day-trippers. From my personal observations (as a researcher), there was no significant presence of Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics within the festival. Particularly, there was a noteworthy presence of Whites at the campground particularly among serious visitors; this is based on my personal observations during the festival. The ethnic background of the study participants also demonstrates the over-representation of Whites among serious visitors. There were only two non-Whites among the interviewees, one being a Black and the other being a Hispanic. This discrepancy appears to be due to the level of commitment among the different ethnic groups. According to Shamir (1988: 244), “a person is internally committed to a leisure activity, role, or relationship when he or she sees it as expressing a valued aspect of his or her identity”. As he contends, the validation of

one's important identity is a requirement for commitment. Viewed from this perspective, the over-representation of Whites among serious visitors may be attributable to their rather easy identification with the theme of the festival. As the Renaissance represents European history, it would be easier for European Americans (Whites) to connect their ethnic identity to the theme of the festival than it would be for other ethnic groups. Conversely, it is not easy for Blacks to be internally committed to the theme of the festival because it does not provide any heritage connection nor validates their ethnic identity. Hence, they attend the festival as a mere spectator or a casual visitor who makes a minimal commitment. Consequently, they do not constitute a segment of serious visitors at the festival. The close association between the theme of the festival and visitor ethnicity as hinted at in this study suggests a possible strategy to control visitor profiles through managing the themes. First of all, Medieval or Renaissance themed festivals may incorporate other ethnic cultures at the given time period in order for other ethnic groups to identify more easily with the festival and be committed to the festival. This endeavor may allow these groups to evolve into a segment of serious visitors as described in this study. Second, as a more general strategy, a festival manager needs to evaluate the extent to which the theme of the festival is connected to the possible target markets. While it is not necessarily appropriate to utilize a theme that is broad enough to encompass all socio-cultural spectrums (if there is one), it appears to be crucial for one to adopt a theme that can appeal to a selected market segment. Hence, festival managers should always be conscious of the changing needs of their target market and make the necessary adjustments to the salient theme for the long-term viability of the festival.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

It is apparent from this research that additional research is needed to better understand this unique form of tourism activity. Thus, in this last section will be presented some potential research directions that sprang from the results of this study. It is anticipated that additional research endeavors on the complex issues presented below

will help expand our understanding on the phenomenon of serious participation in the Texas Renaissance Festival, as well as other tourism activities. Several directions for future study are summarized as follows:

(1) Future research needs to explore the diverse segments of visitors to this type of medieval themed festival. Although the focus of the present study was on individuals seriously involved with the festival, it has been observed that there is a wide spectrum of visitors to this festival. The conceptual visitor spectrum encompasses serious visitors at one extreme and casual visitors at the other extreme. Throughout the research project, the term of “serious (or hard core)” visitors was used frequently in contrast to its counterpart “casual” visitors. “Serious” visitors were identified by a certain level of time (also some monetary) commitment, social involvement with the subculture created within the festival, and the experience of participating in the festival. They are placed at the core of the various visitor groups found at the festival. “Casual” visitors, on the other hand, indicate individuals who come to the festival without wearing a costume and do not become a part of the festival’s subculture. They are the passive consumers of the festival experience in the sense that they play the role of spectators or audiences for the staged performances only within the confines of the festival. It is certain that the two groups represent a significant portion of visitors to this festival. However, although this was not a major focus of this study, there seems to be an intermediary level of visitors in terms of their involvement with the festival. While sharing several behavioral similarities (e.g., costuming and long-term participation in the festival), this segment of visitors is significantly different from the serious visitors in that they do not join in the subculture of the festival, particularly at the campground. If one does not become a part of the subculture, as identified through this study, he/she is not likely to receive similar benefits (e.g., sense of belonging). Thus, it would be erroneous to identify them as a part of either serious visitors or casual visitors. Although there is no statistical data on this, informal conversations with many of the visitors and a marketing director of the festival led us to believe that there exists a considerable number of such visitors to the festival. From a marketing perspective, it is important to identify this group of visitors as they

seem to constitute a significant portion of repeat visitors to the festival. As they differ from both casual and serious visitors, some preliminary research questions such as “how do they evolve from casual visitors?” and “why do they not develop into serious visitors?” would be beneficial for festival marketers to fully understand the dynamism of festival visitor cultures.

(2) Recognizing the danger of overgeneralizing beyond the current context, future research needs to explore the relevance of the present research findings to other similar tourism and leisure contexts. Particularly, it should be noted that there are about 195 Medieval or Renaissance themed festivals in the U.S. Many study participants informed me that they often attend other similar festivals as the Texas Renaissance Festival. This suggests that the existence of this serious form of leisure and the attainment of existential authenticity may be unique to this type of festival. To examine this phenomenon, first, Medieval festivals located in other states need to be explored in terms of serious leisure and authentic experience. Once it is identified that a form of serious leisure is prevalent to this type of festival, a systematic research effort needs to be made to understand what aspects of Medieval themed festivals function to foster a form of serious leisure, existentially authentic experiences, and how these compare to the serious leisure and experiences of other types of festivals.

(3) Visitor studies of heritage/cultural theme parks have emphasized the importance of interactions between the settings and visitors, which is reflected in the popular usage of perceived authenticity of the displays within the parks (Chhabra, Healy, and Sills 2003; McIntosh and Prentice 1999; Waitt). However, the serious visitors interviewed in this study did not show any particular interest in the historical accuracy of the park settings and activities. On the contrary, although they may be engaged in some historical reenactment, a majority of them indicated that they would not sacrifice their personal imagination and pleasure seeking for the sake of historical accuracy. For them, the ambiance of the different time and space serves as a medium to delve into the hidden aspects of self or attain the human relationship based on common bond. The perceived authenticity of physical settings and activities were not the main concern for them.

Future research, thus, could attempt to better identify these relationships: the interactive experiences occurring between the serious leisure tourist, in comparison to the experiences occurring between the physical settings (or activities).

(4) The results of this study were instrumental in gaining understanding of the concept of alienation as a state of individual experience. Although three dimensions of alienating experience were identified through this study (social isolation, cultural disengagement, and self-estrangement), the other dimensions (powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness) of alienating experience are also important in order to better understand the role of alienation as an impetus for diverse tourism and leisure behaviors. Thus, future research should further explore other dimensions of alienation, particularly as an impetus for participating in tourism or leisure activities.

(5) Research attention should be paid to the evolving nature of human relationships particularly in tourism and leisure contexts. The experience of *communitas* arising specifically among tourists has been widely noted in diverse recreation and tourism contexts (Arnold and Price 1993; Lett 1983; Wang 1999). After reviewing the literature reporting touristic *communitas*, it is suggested that the interactions in a liminal zone are likely to induce a spirit of fraternity and comradeship. However, as exemplified in this study, a spontaneous *communitas* would eventually develop into a normative *communitas* generating a new set of social roles and statuses. That is, the human interaction once governed by *communitas* soon develops structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships. However, it is not clear from this study what turns this once touristic *communitas* into more structured and permanent relationships. Also, it is not clear how experiences change when such a touristic relationship, free from social norms and regulations, moves into the sphere of everyday life. Special attention should be paid in future research to what factors enable transitory tourism interactions to consolidate into more permanent relationships, and how individual experiences subsequently change.

(6) Serious leisure tourists examined in this study were engaged in an intensive identity work during the festival. These identity works are well reflected in their



significant effort for costuming and developing festival characters. Such identities created through leisure/tourism activities appear to be critical in their overall perception of self, at least among the serious participants of the Texas Renaissance Festival. More research efforts need to be made to understand the role of leisure/tourism identity in constructing everyday self perception.

(7) The Texas Renaissance Festival is a type of period theme park that loosely represents the Renaissance or Medieval time period through diverse built environments and reenactments. Obviously, the accurate representation of the historical period is not a critical issue in this specific festival as it is more of a fantasy oriented commercial attraction. However, the core elements that are widely accepted and prevalent among the serious visitors studied here are still related to the portrayal of the Renaissance or Medieval era although its accuracy may be questionable. It appears that this image of the past that goes beyond one's living memory appeals significantly to highly committed visitors, as well as casual visitors. This focuses attention on the role of nostalgia as a possible underlying force for the serious involvement in medieval/historical themed tourism attractions. Lowenthal (1985: 33) maintains that:

People are normally aware that the actual past is irrecoverable. Yet memory and history, relic and replica leave impressions so vivid, so tantalizingly concrete, that we cannot help but feel deprived... Yet the enduring dream of reliving the past also has some virtues. It brings history and memory vividly to mind, setting in sharp relief both the deficiencies and the virtues of the present; intense awareness of the past lends the present fullness and duration as well.

The costuming practices and role-playing interactions prevalent among serious visitors within this medieval themed festival reflect the modern practice of reliving the past. In light of Lowenthal's (1985) insight to the nostalgic past as a window through which the present is reframed, in the future research into how should explore how nostalgic images of the distant past are associated with shaping the present experience should be undertaken.

(8) From a methodological perspective, the results of the present study lead to the suggestion that there is a potentially useful way to approach festival research. Previous

festival and theme park research appears to be limited to structural or functional perspectives in their research orientation that is characterized by an over-reliance on the survey method. While such an approach (deductive and causal approaches) has its own merits, it tends to marginalize the voice of locals (study subjects) while imposing researchers' world views on the local issue. This is not to say that these conventional approaches are inappropriate for festival and special event research but to say that more diverse issues could be explored by adopting more diversified research methods. For example, the insights generated by this qualitative research study provide the rich contextual detail that would have been inaccessible through conventional methods and assumptions. Each festival has its own uniqueness, and visitor experience would be different from one festival to another because of the particular details of each festival. Because of this, it seems necessary to fully consider the detailed context of the festival in order to better understand the diverse experiences that take place within that context. Hence, a qualitative approach that may better incorporate the research settings into the findings should be utilized as a useful alternative or a complementary one to more quantitatively structured way to better understand the festivals and related experiences.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study suggests that a high level of commitment to the Texas Renaissance Festival may be conceived of as a form of serious leisure. The phenomenological experiences of the "serious" visitors resonated with the essential characteristics of existential authenticity. Although such an invented commercialized event as the Texas Renaissance Festival has often been denigrated as generating only superficial (Boorstin 1961), inauthentic (McCannell 1976), or simulated (Eco 1987) experiences for the participants, the present study illustrates that it may be utilized for some people as a sacred realm that transcends their mundane existence. Thereby, they are able to experience relatively unfiltered bodily feelings, desired aspects of self, and authentic interpersonal relationships. These authentic experiences are often transferred to their everyday life as they become a part of the subculture formed through the festival. This

study, in this sense, can be seen as a representation of the way that individuals fulfill the fundamental human needs (authenticity) suppressed under the contemporary sociocultural conditions through a form of serious leisure.

Many social scientists have maintained that industrialization magnified tendencies in society towards chronic anomie, fragmentation, and restlessness by atomizing the worker and commodifying work activity (Rojek 1995). Human relationships also became more episodic and fragmented, consequently leading to the decline of social capital in an industrialized society, such as the U.S. (Putnam 1999). In response to these undesired outcomes, modern individuals may be engaged in non-work time activities as a way to escape and, moreover, to connect to other social worlds. Indeed, people increasingly resort to leisure (including tourism) activities as a source of life meaning, personal identity, and intimate social networks, while work simply becomes a means to secure the end of non-work time (Stebbins 1982; 2001).

It is difficult to determine that such a leisure driven society has already emerged, as maintained by some leisure scholars. Additionally, it is not likely that all types of leisure activities provide people with personal meanings and social connections that help sustain their lives. Nor is everyone likely to resort to leisure activities to anchor their lives. It appears that many still obtain their central life meaning from work. Moreover, a fantasized world of transcendence and renewal often promised by such leisure (tourism) activities may be a momentary illusion that is doomed to be shattered. Cohen and Taylor (1992: 105), for instance, maintain that “It is only in rare circumstances, and among rare beings, that a fantasy life feels solid and continuous enough to constitute some sort of alternative world, some escape from paramount reality, something that is more than Simmel’s ‘island in life’”. While participation in a commercial theme park such as the Texas Renaissance Festival is bounded in time and space, for some who enjoy it as a form of serious leisure, it represents something solid and continuous enough to shape their reality. For them, it is this unique tourism/leisure activity that substantiates their place in the social world. It is through the festival that they experience authentic communal relationships. More importantly, it is through leisure

activities in combination with the subculture that they construct or regain their real-self that, they believe, has been suppressed by everyday reality. Thus, an interpretation of the study results suggests that participation in this medieval themed festival as a form of serious leisure is best understood as a quest for authentic self and human relationship in a socially constructed alternative reality.

It is hoped that this study helps advance the theoretical understanding of commercial tourism activity that has been rather marginalized in both leisure and tourism literature. As indicated, the conventional view of such a commercial attraction appears to emphasize its function as a producer of momentary fun and enjoyment that are only trivial to the life of participants. While such perspective may be valid for many casual visitors, it should not be overlooked that there also exist a significant number of people who enjoy it seriously and gain a host of benefits identified through this study. For some, it is not a trivial day-dreaming activity but a central life interest that may affect many aspects of their personal and social life. Although this study explored only one medieval themed commercial attraction, it is reasonable to believe that similar phenomenon can be found in other forms of tourism and leisure activity where communal interactions are greatly emphasized. Thus, more research attention should be paid to this rather neglected domain.

In this study, I have explored a unique form of tourism behavior occurring at the Texas Renaissance Festival as perceived by a segment of committed visitors. Through an interpretation of the results, I have come to a conclusion that the serious consumption of tourism experiences can be best understood as a dynamic process of attaining existential state of Being. While such interpretation specifically contributes to understanding the linkage between serious leisure and tourism, it also points toward a more general concern of how contemporary individuals come to maintain their existence particularly through non-work time activities.

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APPENDIX A  
GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. Festival participation

1. What is your real name?
2. What is your festival name?
3. When was the first time you attended this type of festival? And what festival?
4. How did you get involved in this type of festival?
5. Since then, how often do you come to this type of festival?
6. Approximately, how much time do you spend for this type of festival per year?
7. Why do you think you keep coming back to this type of festival?
8. Did you ever have any difficulties regarding festival participation since it may involve more time and money for you to be a part of it? If yes, how did you get over those difficulties?
9. What do you like about this type of festival? And also about the Texas Renaissance Festival?
10. What kind of efforts do you make to come to the festival over and over?
11. What kind of benefits do you think you receive by coming to this type of festival?
12. I've heard that there are several groups in this festival.
  - Do you belong to any kind of group?
  - If yes, can you describe about the group and how you get involved in that group?
  - What do you do in the group?
  - And what does the group do?

- If your group has some kind of membership, how does the membership work?
- How do you like about being a member of the group?
- Is the group different from your other regular social groups outside the festival? In what way?

13. What kind of person are you like in your everyday life?

14. What does it like to work (live) at that place?

15. How are you like when you are in garb?

16. How are you like when you are not in garb?

17. Can you describe yourself and your personality within the festival?

- How is it different from your everyday life?
- How do you think the festival participation (Renaissance festival) has affected the way you perceive yourself?
- How does the festival participation affect the way of your life?

#### B. Costume related questions

1. What does your costume portray?

2. How long have you been in this costume (and character)?

3. Why did you pick this specific costume?

4. How much did you have to spend on this costume (and others) in terms of time and money?

5. What kind of comforts or discomforts does wearing costume involve?



6. Is this the only costume you wear during the festival? If there is any other, can you please describe about the other costumes and the reason to wear the costumes?
7. What kind of costumes have you gone through since the first time you participated in this type of festival? If there has been any change, can you explain why you have gone through all those different costumes (and characters)?
8. What does it feel like to be here in the festival in garb?
9. How does the costume affect the way you interact with other costume people?
10. How does the costume affect the way you interact with mundane people who are in regular jeans and shirts?
11. How do you feel when people approach you and ask for a picture?

C. Group interaction

1. How do you perceive the other people in garb? In other words, how are they different from the mundane people?
2. What do you do when you're in camp-site?
3. How is the interaction with other costume people different when you are in camp-site, compared to when you are in the festival site?
4. Do you contact your festival friends outside the festival?
5. How do you maintain your relationship with festival friends outside the festival?

6. What kind of activities do you do when you meet with festival friends outside the festival?

D. Background questions

1. What year were you born?
1. Do you have (your own) family?
2. What line of work are you in?
3. How long have you been in the work?
4. What is the highest education that you had?
5. If there is any conflict between the work (or family obligation) and festival participation, how do you manage the conflict?
6. Do you have any other particular leisure activities that you are involved in besides the Renaissance festival?
7. What do you think of the Renaissance era? Did you have any kind of preference for this specific era or the past period?
8. Do you do anything related to Renaissance era or festival outside the festival (in your everyday life)?

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

### Information Sheet

You have been asked to participate in a research study of festival experience. You were selected as one of 50 possible participants because you were identified with long-term involvement with the Renaissance themed festivals. The purpose of this study is to understand experiences of visitors who make enduring commitments to the Renaissance themed festivals.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to explain your activities and experiences at the Texas Renaissance Festival. The interview will be audiotaped unless you refuse to do so. You can refuse to be audiotaped at any time during the interview and can request to erase the tape of the interview. The interview will take about an hour. There is no financial compensation for the participation of this study.

This interview will be kept strictly confidential. The tape and its transcript will be used only for academic purpose. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure the confidentiality of study participants' identity. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Hyounggon Kim and his research committees will have access to the records. The audiotapes will be destroyed after three years. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Texas A&M University. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that make you uncomfortable. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and the tape will be given to you if you request it. You can contact Hyounggon Kim at [filmgon@neo.tamu.edu](mailto:filmgon@neo.tamu.edu) or Dr. Tazim Jamal at [tjamal@tamu.edu](mailto:tjamal@tamu.edu) with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board- Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, You can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Research Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at (979) 845-8585 ([mwbuckley@tamu.edu](mailto:mwbuckley@tamu.edu)).

By answering my questions, you consent to participate in the study.

### Audio Tape Release Form

#### Consent to be Taped

I voluntarily agree to be audiotaped during the interview being conducted by Hyounggon Kim. I understand that the tapes will be used only for academic purpose and only Hyounggon Kim and his research committees can have an access to them. I understand that I can refuse to be audiotaped at any time during the interview and can request to erase the tape of the interview. These tapes will be identified by the names of participants. The tapes will be kept for 2 years at Texas A&M University, Francis Hall #351c. After the research is over, the tapes will be erased.

|                           |  |      |  |
|---------------------------|--|------|--|
| Signature of subject      |  | Date |  |
| Signature of investigator |  | Date |  |

#### Refusal to be Taped

I do not agree to be audiotaped during the interview being conducted by Hyounggon Kim. By refusing to be audiotaped, I understand that I may not continue the participation in the study.

|                           |  |      |  |
|---------------------------|--|------|--|
| Signature of subject      |  | Date |  |
| Signature of investigator |  | Date |  |

## VITA

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### Education:

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2001-2004      Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences  
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